MARCH 24, 1982 • $1.50

Is Reagan a Blockhead? By Morton Kondracke

Nadine Gordimer • Bowman Cutter on the Budget of Oz • Walter Laqueur

THE NEW REPUBLIC

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CORRESPONDENCE

BUYING PEACE

To the editors:

It is sad to see THE NEW REPUBLIC as confused about El Salvador as the President ("Things Left Unsaid," March 10). In your editorial you say, "American money is necessary to hold El Salvador together, not American lives." Like the pharisee in the temple, even you are ready to let money take the place of a real defense of human life and of the values we like to think we stand for in the world.

Your money solution is bound to fail, as Duarte cannot control the criminals on his right. So then take the money away, you say. The center collapses altogether. If the right ascends, Reagan finds a way to befriend it, and we are once again in bed with the sort of Latin regime we love best. If the left ascends, Reagan fulminates, and hatred for America grows in Latin hearts. In any event the slaughter of the innocents continues.

Reagan should go to Congress and say, "With your consent I will send troops to El Salvador to end the civil war there. We will put an end to the violence by the right and the left. In the peace thus secured, quite frankly, by American occupation, the rebuilding of Salvadoran democracy by negotiation or election can resume."

Unfortunately, Reagan would not be as ruthless with terrorists of the right as he would be with those of the left. Unfortunately, his liberal opposition, held hostage against any use of military force by the memory of Vietnam, would throw up its hands at such a display of American machismo. Neither Reagan nor his liberal opposition has the wisdom to see that money cannot buy peace (for those who might be interested, the first requirement is order, the second is justice). Does Reagan or his liberal opposition have the moral courage to use any other means?

Hal Riedl
Baltimore, Maryland

VACUUM IN EL SALVADOR

To the editors:

Your editorial endorsement of the middle way in El Salvador is troubling ("Friendly Fire," TNR, February 17). The leftist sympathies of guerrillas and presumed civilian atrocities committed in their name do not wash over the fact that there is simply no basis for hope that a democratic non-Marxist center will emerge.

Far from romantic guerrillaism, support for the Democratic Revolutionary Front is warranted by an utter vacuum in the Salvadoran center—Duarte standing alone, dependent on the toleration of generals allied with the extreme right—and military disregard for the barest forms of popular legitimacy. A moderate democratic center cannot be fabricated from this vacuum, regardless of the entreaties and blandishments of our State Department. Archconservative, violence-hardened generals are not apt to suddenly turn pliable satraps of the United States. In this milieu, military assistance has not yet proved, and will not prove, its worth in leverage.

Like Graham Greene's Pyle, our statesmen myopically, tragically, pursue a mirage. Yet as Greene's moral shows, blind centrism is every bit as dogmatic as leftism and rightism is in the face of stark alternatives. Unfortunately, our best choice is not with the status quo, and change, of any popular stripe, is on the left.

Stephen P. Mumme
Tucson, Arizona

REHNQUIST'S CONSERVATISM

To the editors:

Like my fellow liberals Owen Fiss and Charles Krauthammer, I do not approve of most of the opinions of Justice Rehnquist ("The Rehnquist Court," TNR, March 10). Unlike them, I see no reason to deny that he is what he has repeatedly said that he is: a conservative.

For some reason, many liberals enjoy separating their right-wing foes into "true" and "false" conservatives. The criteria used in this classification process are obscure. But generally, "true" conservatives are either dead (Edmund Burke, Justice Harlan, Robert Taft) or politically ineffective and hence nonthreatening (Senator Goldwater in his present incarnation). Conservatives who are alive and politically effective (Justice Rehnquist, Representative Phil Gramm, Richard Viguerie) will never be regarded by such liberals as "true" conservatives.

Justice Rehnquist is in fact an articulate heir to the most solid, consistent, and long-lasting political tradition in the history of the United States, that of states rights conservatism. I certainly agree that this tradition has been a noxious one, in the main. A punctilious regard for state prerogatives and an anxious eye on the encroachments of the Washington leviathan did not mean that human rights were being protected, as Thomas Jefferson's slaves could have told anyone who asked. But to deny that an insanely high regard for states rights is in fact an American conservative tradition is pure self-delusion.

Peter Connolly
Washington, D.C.

VERMONT'S ALTRUISM

To the editors:

While it may be true that the Federal Crisis Relocation Plan would bloat the populations of Vermont's towns if a nuclear blast were threatened (when is it not?), most Vermonters supporting the resolution for a mutual arms freeze are blissfully unaware of that contingency (Notebook, TNR, February 24). You urban cynics should be informed that some degree of altruism remains tucked away in these snowy hills. We would prefer not to see the world blown apart, and we are not "God-fearing" so much as Reagan/Brezhnev-fearing.

Please don't interpret this outburst of humanism as an invitation for a visit.

Eric P. Lindner
Barre, Vermont

POLITICAL PROFITEER

To the editors:

The privilege of "patriotic glow" will never belong to the Harvard class of 1965, if indeed their hearts felt what it is claimed their lips spoke (Washington Diarist, TNR, March 10). Self-preservation is the "glow" (of the inner variety, obviously) that debars patriotism. The attitudes of Harvard '65 were a true indication of what overeducation and underappreciation of privilege can conspire to foment. The fashion of the time was to be antiwar, a laughable claim having all the contentiousness of apple pie and motherhood. Who was prowar? No one needs to take off his shoes to complete the count. Fear was then, and always will be, the emotion truly felt when death's possibility is faced. Most of Caputo's classmates denied fear and

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THE TERRIBLE COST OF UNION VIOLENCE

Charles Eaves

Larry Crawford had heard the insults, the racial slurs and the death threats before as he crossed the picket line. After all, the strike at Virginia Lime Co. near Pearisburg, Va. had been going on for months. But the strikers were growing more vicious in their language every day. And were those insults, slurs and threats really "just" words?

The verbal assaults on Larry were taking their toll. He couldn't sleep at night. He was nervous, irritable and often depressed. Nothing seemed to improve his appetite or make his crushing headaches go away. Psychiatrists call it "traumatic stress reaction." Men at war call it "combat fatigue."

And then on a cold February day, one of Larry's non-striking co-workers learned what it was like to be shot at. A shotgun blast tore into his car. Fortunately, no one was hurt.

But Larry Crawford realized the same thing could happen to him, to his wife and child. And all because local members of the United Steel Workers refused to accept Larry's right, his need, to work.

With the help of the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, Larry and eight co-workers, including Charles Eaves and Raleigh Newby, fought back. Within the law. The strikers were hauled into court and held accountable for conduct later called "vile and degrading" by the judge.

Justice was served in Giles County Circuit Court. Larry and his eight co-workers received a judgement of $99,000 in damages for physical and verbal attacks suffered during the 18-month strike.

But the strikers are expected to appeal their case, which is likely to go all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. Compulsory union dues will pay for their lawyers. High-powered research staffs will seek out every legal loophole to postpone the day when Larry Crawford, Charles Eaves, Raleigh Newby and their families can sleep soundly at night.

The National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation is helping everyone it can. Currently, some 250 cases involving protection from union violence, illegal union political spending, academic and political freedom and other basic employee rights are being prepared or brought before courts across the nation.

Raleigh Newby

For information on how you can help Larry Crawford and his family, write us. We'd like to hear from you today. And so would the Crawford family.

National Right to Work Legal
Defense Foundation
Dept. NRP
8001 Braddock Road
Springfield, VA 22160

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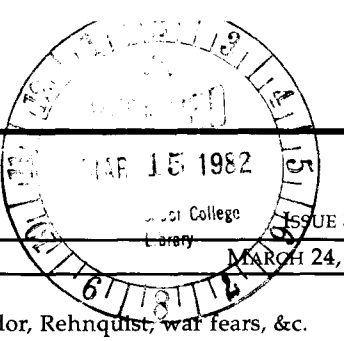

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TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

The Nixon Legend

We are too close to Watergate to see it in perspective, but after reading the three excerpts of Henry Kissinger's forthcoming book, *Years of Upheaval*, in *Time* magazine, I think it has a mythic quality. This is the stuff of dream and legend, like Shakespeare's histories and the tragedies of Aeschylus. America saw it happen and can't quite believe it. It transcends credulity. Give us one hundred years.

Here is the leader of the world's strongest power, just reelected by the second largest plurality in history, who is living in a practical everyday world, who has visited Peking and Moscow and achieved detente—yet, who, by some character quirk, defies the gods and is destroyed. The spider strangles in its own web. The saga's qualities are so fanciful and grandiose that they almost efface the tragedy.

At 5:58 p.m. on Wednesday, August 7, 1974, chief of staff Alexander Haig calls Secretary of State Kissinger and asks him to come immediately to the White House. Kissinger finds Nixon alone in the Oval Office. Nixon says he will resign. He will speak to the nation the next evening. Kissinger isn't quite sure what happened next. He believes that he put his arm around Nixon, "bridging at the end the distance that had separated us on the human level all these years." But did he really do it, this audacious gesture, this breaking down of the barrier between them? "Nixon does not report it in his memoirs," Kissinger admits curiously. "So perhaps it did not happen, and I only felt like doing it."

Is this shyness? Nixon always patronized Kissinger, the German-born American with the foreign accent. Nixon condescended to him, and yet Kissinger and Bebe Rebozo were about the only ones who brought out a strain of gentleness in Nixon's convoluted, tormented personality.

There are not many such scenes in American history—it is too humdrum. There is George Washington praying at Valley Forge, who became the unapproachable character of the legend; there is Lincoln turned into a martyr and tutelary power at Ford's Theater, now looking out lovingly from his marble shrine over his fair land; yes, and there is poor Hoover, a good and pious man, I think, destroyed by forces he could not understand. So now, with Nixon, we have a legend of a different sort—a man whose devil was insecurity, and who destroyed himself for no good reason at all.

At 9 p.m. that same evening, Kissinger received a call from Nixon himself. Would he come over? He found Nixon alone in the Lincoln Sitting Room. Kissinger reflects on it: "Nothing could be more poignant than that at the close of his political career Nixon was left alone with the one associate about whom he was most ambivalent, who made him uneasy even while counting on him to embody the continuity of his achievements."

And it needn't have happened. In fact it seems almost incredible that it did happen, even in the sleazy atmosphere of the Nixon incumbency. The Watergate break-in occurred in June, ten years ago. It was carried out by unknown criminals who were caught by accident. One of them had taped the door lock too conspicuously. The White House press secretary dismissed it as "a third-rate burglary attempt." How far off and amateurish everything now seems. I don't mean Watergate alone. We believed in a monolithic Sino-Soviet bloc with homogeneous ideology; China and Russia were wicked twins. We sent 500,000 Americans to combat this conspiracy. It was the test of whether the United States could handle a global conspiracy. And at home, with the 1972 election coming on, Nixon and his White House team undertook their dirty tricks. There were the "plumbers" to investigate new leaks; there were wiretaps on the phones of seventeen officials and newsmen; there were fantasies about planting the Democratic convention with prostitutes, and kidnapping possible demonstrators who might bother the Republican convention. There were real break-ins and thefts, too (none of them necessary and all, in retrospect, extraordinarily risky). It was a world of melodrama. Nixon had found a secret tape recorder in the Oval Office left over from L.B.J., and had fine-tuned the system. Previously it was activated by the President at his desk only when he wanted it. Nixon worked up a self-activating machine that continuously recorded everything said in the room. This had one ludicrous result: it meant Nixon threw in some unexpected patriotic platitude every now and then, to show for posterity how noble he was.

Kissinger doesn't go into all of this. It is partly my own reflections, to sharpen some of the things he ambivalently leaves out. The point is that the tragedy was unnecessary. For weeks after Watergate, Nixon could have saved his skin by a full explanation of what had gone on. He didn't do it. He chose to try to brazen it out, and it got worse week by week. It was an epic. Slowly the constrictions tightened on him. Six months into his second Presidency he had become a lame duck with his moral position destroyed.

Nixon tossed his team to the sharks one after another, Haldeman and Ehrlichman included. Nixon might still have destroyed the tapes when their presence was revealed to the Ervin Committee, but he was in the hospital, and the Supreme Court ordered him to turn them over. The bewildered Kissinger recalls a cryptic answer from Ehrlichman at the time: "Our major problem is to get John Mitchell (Attorney General and Nixon campaign leader) to own up to his responsibility." This invitation to be the fall guy, at least, was declined. Virgin-faced John Dean of the White House staff also saw that the sharpies were after him, and he outsmarted them.

This is the stuff of legend. It will be a dark strand in American folklore for years to come. We know it happened, indeed we watched with 130 million others on August 8, 1974, when Nixon said he would resign the next day. But can we believe it? America elected him twice, and he had to mold a public personality out of an amorphous identity before our eyes. He was doomed in an almost biblical consummation.

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THE NEW REPUBLIC
MARCH 24, 1982

POISON AT THE EPA

The lowest priority at the Environmental Protection Agency these days is environmental protection. The EPA has become the Reagan Administration's most faithful outrider in the long march to a deregulated—or, more accurately, de-governed—America. The agency's latest outrage is its scrapping of rules that ban the wanton dumping of liquid "hazardous wastes" in landfills and open pits, a practice with a proven tendency to poison water supplies, causing such nasty side effects as cancer and birth defects. When industry complained about these "onerous" rules, the heart of Anne Gorsuch, the Administrator of the EPA, melted. She overrode her staff's recommendations and announced that in ninety days the agency will issue much weaker standards, allowing up to 25 percent of the capacity of dump sites to be filled with barrels of poisonous liquid. For the interim, Ms. Gorsuch suspended the rules entirely. The result is a three-month binge that has already begun, as the chemical industry and others clear out their overstocked barrels and dump whatever they want, wherever they want, whenever they want.

The regulations on hazardous waste disposal, ordered by Congress in 1976 and promulgated by the Carter EPA in 1980, were the first attempts to do something about the 94 billion pounds of toxic garbage that the U.S. produces each year. It was hoped that, with these rules in place, another costly Love Canal nightmare could be averted. Given the many preferable alternatives to landfill dumping—such as incineration and recycling—that hope was not unreasonable. But at today's EPA, such wise, long-term environmental planning has been obscured by an obsession with short-term money costs. Ms. Gorsuch proposes to cut such costs by eliminating the quarterly checks on groundwater that flows under hazardous waste facilities, as well as the requirement that those facilities have plans for coping with toxic disasters. The agency even turned aside a proposal made by the chemical industry that dump sites be lined with impermeable material to catch the leaks. These actions fly in the face of Congressional intent; worse, they reveal the EPA's short-sightedness. In addition to the obvious health hazards posed by the policy, the expense of cleaning up tomorrow's Love Canals will far outweigh any savings that industry and government gain today.

Ironically, some of the loudest criticism of the EPA's proposed revisions have come from segments of industry. The few businesses that had the prescience to set up alternative forms of toxic liquid disposal now find themselves at a competitive disadvantage with the many more that didn't. The EPA's actions have rewarded the polluters and penalized the long-term planners and the environmentally conscious. Two firms that have invested heavily in alternative technology—ENSCO and SCA Services Inc.—have joined the Environmental Defense Fund in a suit to reimpose the ban. Faced with a barrage of complaints, the EPA has announced that it will begin hearings on March 11 to reconsider its decision.

The EPA's suspension of the dumping ban is only one of the most visible expressions of the agency's reverse approach to environmental protection. Throughout the agency, programs continue to be cut with the same ruthless abandon that has characterized the entire budget exercise. The average American's exposure to toxic chemicals is expected to double in the 1980s. In the wake of Love Canal, Congress required the agency to tackle the massive job of researching and controlling environmental toxics, a task which would have doubled the EPA's workload. Having invested over $130 million in the program, the EPA was ready to start regulating some 120 priority poisons this year. But the Reagan-Gorsuch budget calls for an overall 42 percent reduction in the agency, which has entailed the virtual elimination of its toxic control program. Specifically, Ms. Gorsuch's plans would result in a cut in staff from 11,400 to 6,000, and in the agency's purchasing power

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from $1.4 billion to about $525 million (after inflation) over the next two years. If Congress permits this to go through, not only will the EPA be unable to tackle its new job of regulating environmental poisons, it will no longer have the means to do its old job of keeping the air and water clean. As former assistant administrator William Drayton points out, "To think that half an agency can do twice as much is sheer illusion."

THE EPA'S SHARP move away from enforcement and prosecution is equally alarming. As soon as she took office, Ms. Gorsuch abolished the agency's enforcement division and scattered its staff among the various other programs. Yet for the past eleven years that division has been the key to the EPA's effectiveness. If the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act have had impressive results, it is primarily because polluting industries were brought to court and sued. The EPA's new approach to enforcement can be easily gauged by the number of cases it has filed involving hazardous waste sites. In the last eighteen months of the Carter Administration, when the regulations took effect, fifty-five cases were filed. In the fourteen months since Mr. Reagan came into office, six cases have been filed, and only two of them since Ms. Gorsuch took over in May.

Furthermore, Ms. Gorsuch plans to stop spending money on those sites already determined to be dangerous health hazards. In one of its last gasps, the 96th Congress imposed a tax on chemical companies to create a "Superfund" to pay for cleaning up other existing Love Canals. Next year $283 million from the fund will be made available to the EPA. Even though Ms. Gorsuch herself has listed 114 toxic dumping sites that pose an immediate danger to the public, she has asked for only $190 million, and intends to spend far less than that. Indeed, only a minute fraction of the money she received in 1981 has been spent.

Given the enthusiasm with which Ms. Gorsuch has used the Reagan budget cuts to undermine her own agency, how does she plan to control pollution and protect the environment? One answer, apparently, is voluntarism, which she expects will fill the gap when the EPA's regulations are stripped away. Since the agency will no longer enforce the laws on the books, it must assume that American business will suddenly cease pursuing short-term profits in favor of the long-term health considerations of us all.

The other answer, of course, is the new federalism. Gorsuch has repeatedly proclaimed her belief that more responsibility for pollution control should be handed over to the states. But even if the idea of having fifty different sets of regulations didn't make the concept impractical, the Reagan budget would make it unfeasible. Grant money allocated to the states has been drastically slashed: state water grants by 51 percent, state air program grants by 20 percent, state drinking water grants by 23 percent, state hazardous waste grants by 9 to 16 percent. Moreover, state governments have shown no great enthusiasm for the idea. The state legislatures of Idaho, Iowa, and Wyoming have already responded to Gorsuch's attempts to increase their role in pollution control by voting to hand that responsibility right back to Washington.

The fact is that pollution cannot be handled state by state because pollution does not respect state lines. It plumes into the air, seeps into water that flows across state borders, and washes up on beaches and banks lapped by interstate oceans, rivers, and lakes. Nor can pollution be tamed by the intangible laws of voluntarism. Even libertarians agree that this is one problem the market isn't equipped to solve. All the market can do is make matters worse, by punishing those companies that spend money on what the Constitution calls the general welfare, and by allowing industry to play the states off each other. The Reagan-Gorsuch approach to environmental protection is suitable only for a world in which pollution grows on trees.

The EPA is fast becoming a mere facade, like a mock building on a Hollywood set. Half the agency's top positions are still vacant and the existing staff is melting away by attrition at an annual rate of 12 percent. To avoid carrying out its mandate, the Reagan EPA has followed a consistent pattern of delaying tactics, nonenforcement of standards, and, as Representative Toby Moffett, Democrat of Connecticut, recently wrote, "deciding which programs to kill or cripple, then cynically using the budget as a justification of those political decisions." It is time for bipartisan action in Congress to put an end to this appalling pattern, before the EPA itself is added to the list of endangered species.

NOTEBOOK

□ IF THERE IS ANYTHING sadder than seeing a seasoned legislator exposed as a common criminal, it is watching him attempt to deflect his guilt by complaining that he is being unjustly persecuted. Senator Harrison Williams has been convicted in court of bribery, among other things, but during expulsion hearings before his Senate colleagues, he maintained that it is only the FBI's Abscam entrapment ploy that deserves condemnation, not his own eagerness to use his office for personal gain. Meanwhile, in Montreal, Claude Charron, the former majority leader of the Quebec Assembly, was chased down the streets last month after he stole a jacket from Eaton's, a Montreal store. When Mr. Charron was summoned to court, his immediate reaction, and that of hundreds of outraged supporters, was that the store had chosen to press charges because of his affiliation with the Parti Quebeçois.

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(The Eaton family does not endorse Mr. Charron's separatist sentiments.) Mr. Charron had the grace to resign after he was caught with the evidence, and even admitted he had made a dumb mistake. But deep down he seems to believe, as does the unrepentant Senator from New Jersey, that he is a man more sinned against than sinning.

□ FIFTY YEARS AGO IN THE NEW REPUBLIC: "If the government is allowed to drift toward insolvency, capitalism is doomed. Yet at the same time, we admit that those who are the chief beneficiaries of capitalism will employ trickery and deceit to avoid supporting the government which is essential to them. We then say that, because the rich will be dishonest and will decline to rally the government which they chiefly control, the burden must be put on the poor, who cannot escape. It must be put, not merely on those who benefit less from the existing regime than those who now pay income taxes, but on those who actively suffer under it, those who cannot afford even to feed their children properly. If this is the example of morale which those who are supposed to lead our society offer to the rest, there is no avoiding the conclusion that it is rotten to the core." (Editorial, "Taxing the Have-Nots," March 23, 1932.)

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

REAGAN'S I.Q.

IN EACH of America's recent failed Presidencies, the press has managed to discover, disclose, and then inculcate into public consciousness a nasty little secret that finally came to dominate the President's image. Lyndon Johnson was a boor, Richard Nixon a crook, Gerald Ford a clown, and Jimmy Carter a mean-spirited incompetent. Right now, with a good bit of help from other politicians and from the President himself, the press is working itself up to declare aloud that our latest emperor also has no clothes. All that remains in doubt is exactly how Ronald Reagan's nakedness will be characterized for posterity.

A pattern is developing. Last September, after two Libyan jets were shot down by U.S. planes, and aides did not awaken the President, *Newsweek* described Reagan as "disengaged," and quoted an unnamed White House aide as saying "he probably spends two or three hours a day on real work. . . . All he wants to do is tell stories about his movie days." Twice in January, Lou Cannon of the *Washington Post* was painfully direct. "More disquieting than Reagan's performance or prospects on any specific issue is a growing suspicion that the President has only a passing acquaintance with some of the most important decisions of his Administration." Cannon cited a long list of Presidential press conference misstatements, and concluded that "as [Reagan] begins his second year he has raised anew one of the principal issues of his Presidential candidacy. Simply put, the question is: is Reagan up to the job?" Cannon's second article, a probing review of Reagan's press conference *faux pas*, said there was concern in the White House that "further verbal fumbling by Reagan may contribute to the impression of a President whose grasp is slipping."

ON FEBRUARY 7, James McCartney of Knight-Ridder Newspapers quoted "responsible, high-level White House officials" as saying that during his first year in office Reagan was almost totally "uninvolved" in key defense and foreign policy decisions. Also at the start of this year, hard-line conservatives began to charge that Reagan had had his Presidency stolen from him by "non-Reaganites." In *Conservative Digest* and *Human Events* the villains were White House chief of staff James Baker and Secretary of State Alexander Haig, but the unstated corollary was that Ronald Reagan had allowed policy and personnel decisions to be taken away from him. According to Howard Phillips of the Conservative Caucus, "The governor has good intuitive judgments, but he lacks confidence in his judgments and relies too much on credentialed expertise. He immerses himself insufficiently in the matters he is forced to deal with. He isn't interested in learning detail and because he knows he lacks the specifics, he defers to the opposition."

On February 22 the *Wall Street Journal* carried a front-page story headlined: REAGAN'S MANAGEMENT BY DELEGATION BEGINS TO CONCERN SUPPORTERS. THEY FEAR THAT A FEELING HE ISN'T ON TOP OF THINGS MAY HURT HIS AUTHORITY, and *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis accused the press of going easy on Reagan, in view of his economic and foreign policy shortcomings. Lewis said the most important reason might be that reporters and editors who watch Reagan "are frightened by what they see . . . a man who acts without real information . . . a man with an anecdotal view of the world, who may apply in El Salvador lessons of imagined history in Vietnam. They see a man who gives simplistic answers to complicated questions." These press people "care about their country, and they find it too upsetting to acknowledge . . . that the enormous power of its leadership is in such hands."

Then, on March 2, the *New York Times*'s new "Washington Talk" page carried a story by White House correspondent Howell Raines, headlined: REAGAN JOKES STIR AIDES' CONCERN, which observed that editorial cartoons and comedians' wisecracks were portraying the President as an "amiable muddler," as Robin Hood in reverse, or as a man not in control of his White House. The same day, the Associated Press carried the

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most damaging piece of all—damaging because it came not from the press itself or from the Democratic opposition (which has, in fact, been relatively tame about attacking Reagan personally), but from Senator Robert Packwood of Oregon, chairman of the Senate Republican Campaign Committee. Packwood said that Reagan responds to the concerns of Republican senators "on a totally different track." If senators tell him they are worried about the projected $120-billion deficit, Packwood said, Reagan responds with an anecdote. "The President says, 'You know a person yesterday, a young man, went into a grocery store and he had an orange in one hand and a bottle in the other and he paid for the orange with food stamps and he took the change and paid for the vodka. That's what's wrong.' "

Reports subsequently emerged from other members of Congress and from the public that Reagan deals in anecdotal non sequiturs all the time. One Northeastern group of shoe industry representatives sought to express concern about foreign competition, for example, and was treated to a Presidential lecture on the difficulty nowadays of buying a pair of cowboy boots as good as the ones available in days of yore.

SO FAR THE CRITICISM has been reasonably gentle and euphemistic. Reagan is "detached," and there is "concern" about his being "in charge" or "out of touch." Cartoonists still portray him as captain of a storm-tossed ship or as a cowboy riding a ferocious economic horse. But the pressure is on to be more frank. Sometimes it's editors who are putting pressure on reporters, but in most cases, it's reporters who are convinced that the President is lazy, passive, stupid, or even senile, and are pushing their editors to let them say so. According to one White House correspondent, "For almost everybody in Washington, Reagan was a new beat, and you don't write that kind of stuff until you're pretty sure of yourself. Reporters are just beginning now to feel that what they feared is true, that he is detached. They've got a notebook full of stuff, and they are beginning to try to sell stories to their editors. The editors are very reluctant to use it. They've seen it with many other Presidents, Gerald Ford in particular, and you hate to reinforce that kind of thing. It's a devastating thing, but it's going to happen, and once he gets tagged with the image, it's going to be hard to get rid of, mostly because he's so old."

There is some faint reason to hope that the patterns of the past will not repeat themselves. For one thing, editors are reluctant to plaster labels on the President that the facts may not sustain. The attitude guiding the *New York Times*, according to Washington bureau chief Bill Kovach, is that the President's brainpower "is not as important as his policies, the effects of his intellect. It doesn't make any difference if policy comes out of a cookie press or a computer or the finest mind in the Western Hemisphere. We'll report what people see and say and smell and feel, but in the end what we've got to pay attention to is the policy—the effect of whatever mind is at work." A *Washington Post* editor said, "My experience in such matters is that history will show that what we all believe to be true will be true—plus about 30 percent or even 50 percent. But at this point it's very difficult to nail it down with specifics in a way that you could write a story saying that the President is not in charge. The White House people regard it as unsayable. We try to be as specific and hard as possible, and we are. If we had real evidence of his being in the Bozo zone, we'd write it. We have not restrained ourselves."

WHITE HOUSE AIDES are aware that the question of Reagan's competence is becoming an issue, but they deny its premise, which may be a valid thing to do. They also tend to discount its importance, which I think is neither valid nor wise. One aide's response was: "Is the President on top of his job? I find that a stunning question after the year in which he won seven straight Congressional victories. It may be that the press demands a big victory every so often to prove that he's still there. He does not fit the press's pattern of the Presidency, but he's got control. I don't think the Presidency requires that someone be deeply immersed in the detail of government or be deeply read in the great works of political literature. It requires someone with a strong sense of where he wants to go and a good sense of leadership, and I think he's got those in abundance."

Reagan's longtime California political adviser, Stuart Spencer, an influential figure in the White House, says, "Hell, yes, he's competent. He's different, though. He isn't much of a games player. He is more of an ideologue. He decides things not so much on the basis of calculations, but on the basis of his philosophy of what's right for the country. It's an indication of his age, of the fact that he's a late starter in politics, and the fact that he was shot last year. The close brush with death has made him more determined than ever to accomplish what he wants to accomplish. The media's discussed the competence issue all his life—whether he was qualified to be Governor of California, whether he was qualified to be President. No, he doesn't understand all the intricate points of government, and he never will, but he's got smart instincts and he's a good judge of timing."

According to an Administration official who has observed Reagan for a long time, "The worst you can say about him is that he has a passive personality, and he does relate to things through anecdotes. He's nowhere near stupid. If you're talking about intellectually academician-bright, half those people are stupid because they lack common sense. No man is stupid with that kind of a sense of timing, that kind of sense of people. That's not just actor's training; no other actor's done what he's done. He's passive not in the sense of not being able to make a hard decision, but in

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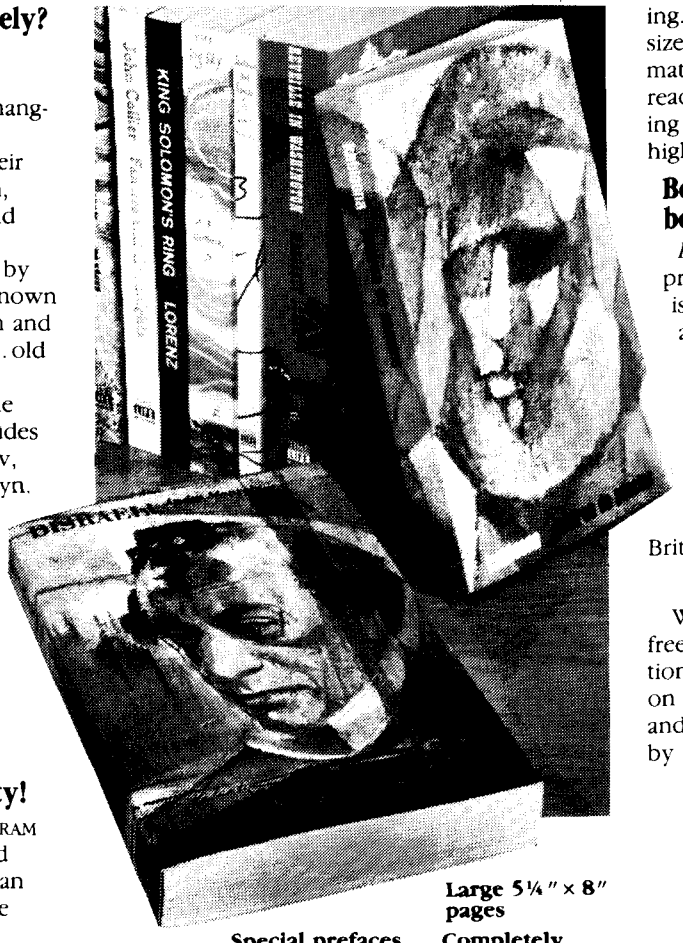

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the way he gets information. He doesn't go out to seek it, reach out for it, and pursue it, but lets it come to him conveniently. 'Intellectually lazy' is probably fair. He's without a constant curiosity."

To Reagan aides, the proof that the President is in charge of his Administration came in January, when he rejected all of their advice that he cut defense and raise taxes to bring his budget closer to balance. "He made the decision. He makes the decisions here, all the major ones. In foreign policy, he makes all the decisions that come to him, and quite a few do. He made the decision on the Rumanian debt against the desires of State and Defense. He sat through many meetings and made the decision on the Soviet pipeline and East-West technology transfers and what to do about Libya. He makes all those decisions. He's not as involved as Jimmy Carter in the day-to-day operations of the Presidency, but I don't think he has to be. He is very well read and up to speed on anything that's given to him—perhaps to a fault. We can't send him too much stuff or he'll stay up till two or three in the morning reading it. The suggestion that he's only going through just the ceremonial motions is just not true."

REAGAN'S TOP AIDES deny that his tendency to indulge in anecdotes shows he is out of touch with reality. According to them, the Republican leadership meeting that Packwood referred to consisted of a senatorial rehash of the same antideficit arguments that Reagan had heard repeatedly during his budget deliberations. "Was he supposed to argue with them all over again, or was it better to change the subject in his own way?" That would plausibly explain the President's desire to deflect the conversation with an anecdote (though it doesn't excuse the unbecoming undertone of prejudice in the anecdote itself). And in the shoe manufacturers' meeting, "they were coming in to talk about protectionist measures to a free trader. There is no doubt where Ronald Reagan was coming down on that issue, and rather than sit there and be disingenuous—telling them he might do something for them when he wouldn't—he related an anecdote that had some relation to the subject." Other aides note that Franklin Roosevelt also put off unpleasant subjects by telling stories, that Americans took Chairman Mao's unintelligible aphorisms for wisdom, and that, until the economy turned bad, Reagan's anecdotes were considered charming.

"I agree with George Will," said one White House assistant, citing Will's remark on an ABC-TV "Nightline" program on the subject of Reagan's competence. "There's nothing here that a 6 percent prime interest rate wouldn't cure." Unfortunately for Reagan, the prime rate is far from 6 percent, and Reaganomics is perceived to be one of the reasons. As a result, Reagan's overall approval ratings are down, and his "leadership" ratings are beginning to dip. The latest Harris results show that more Americans disapprove of Reagan's performance now than approve. When asked whether Reagan inspires confidence in the White House, 56 percent said yes at the end of January, and 39 percent said no. In mid-February, the figures were 48 to 48. Political analyst Kevin Phillips sees other signs of decay. "Watch the chimpanzee cartoons—the number of editorial cartoons each month that conjure up *Bedtime for Bonzo*. You get some measure of what the cartoonists think is fair game. It wasn't fair game last fall, but it's beginning to be now."

What's Reagan to do? His White House aides now have him hold one press conference a month to get him in practice, although so far the results have been more damaging than helpful. Additional press sessions simply increase the opportunity for misstatements. But the President is being more intensively primed for press conferences than he was previously, and each Monday he has an "issues lunch" with ten White House aides who brief him on important pending activities. What matters in the end, though, is not how well Reagan performs in front of reporters, but how well his Administration performs on the major issues of domestic and foreign policy. The results will show whether Ronald Reagan is a political wizard or just the Wizard of Oz. An intellectual genius whose policies fail is a failure, and an imbecile is a success in the unlikely event that his policies succeed. The country will be better off if the press keeps its eye on the prime interest rate, not on Ronald Reagan's I.Q.

MORTON KONDRACKE

An interview with Polish workers.

'WE CAN ONLY SIT'

WHAT IS THE mood of the Polish workers after three months of martial law? Has Jaruzelski's draconian rule succeeded in breaking their spirit and discrediting Solidarity? One would scarcely turn to spokesmen of the regime for answers, or put any stock in such official opinion polls as the one purporting to show that most Poles welcomed martial law with "profound satisfaction." It might be argued that some of the claims made by Solidarity representatives in the West are not necessarily reliable, either. The evidence of continued defiance, and even of large-scale passive resistance, must be carefully examined—something I intend to do in the near future. But surely there can be no question about the sentiments and views that appear below. They are taken from a long television program broadcast in Budapest (not exactly a center of anti-Communist propaganda) on February 17, and translated by the Foreign Broadcast Information Ser-

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vice, a U.S. government agency. The broadcast, conducted in Poland by Gabor Nemes, a well-known Hungarian journalist, consisted of long interviews with party officials, Solidarity members, and Baltic shipyard workers. All the comments are remarkably revealing, but none more than those of workers, reprinted here without change. Bear in mind that the workers (all of them unidentified) were interviewed in the presence of party officials, and with the full knowledge that the price for "slandering the Polish government" may be arrest and imprisonment.

Nemes: Were you all Solidarity members?
A Gdansk shipyard worker: Ninety percent of us are. There are 18,000 people working in the shipyard, and of these 90 percent are Solidarity members.

Q: Do you agree with all the political steps of Solidarity? Did you hear the extremists, for example Rulewski, speak?
Worker: No, I didn't hear him. Or rather, I did hear him but that was broadcast by the government on the mass media. You know, there are two groups inside Solidarity. I was always on the side of Lech Walesa and I continue to be on his side. I stress, therefore, that until they free Walesa and he can come here to the shipyards, there can be no question of reconciliation.

Q: And the other group?
Worker: The other group consists of the more radical people, those who take a more decisive stance, who think that only civil war can improve the situation in Poland.

Q: And if it depended on you, what sort of trade union would you like?
Worker: We need a trade union which governs well, so that things can improve in Poland.

Q: The trade union should govern?
Worker: No, not the trade union, just in general. The trade union has to fight for the right of the workers, isn't it so? So that the worker should do as well as possible. It is not a matter of the trade union possessing power.

Q: What should Solidarity fight for? You said you want the trade union to fight, but for what?
Worker: In general, for improved working conditions, for higher wages and such matters.

Q: Is that all?
Worker: Cheating and lying must be eliminated, because it's spreading. Everything here depends on lying and on connections. No one was responsible for anything anywhere.This is how it was, at the bottom and at the top alike because there was no collective leadership.

[*The workers then speak of shortages of materials and of the fact that work in the shipyards is almost at a standstill.*]

Q: What are you going to do tomorrow? It is a free Sunday.
Worker: I shall sit and think.

Q: What about?
Worker: About the future. Whether we shall survive to see next week. What can we do? There is no gasoline. We can't travel anywhere. We can only sit. One plays with the family, the children, another studies a little. On Sunday we go to church and pray for those who have been interned, who have been arrested, for their early release.

Q: Are there that many people interned or under arrest from this plant?
Worker: Mr. Editor, one can't know this because it's difficult to get any information around here.

Q: But what do you think?
Worker: We can't find out anything. These people have simply disappeared.

Q: What kind of a trade union would you like to see?
Worker: Solidarity, a trade union that should fight for the workers, as indeed it has.

Q: Together with the political activity it has been involved in?
Worker: What political activity? I don't know of any. Even so, Solidarity should fight for the workers.

Q: There is now a state of emergency. I know this is a difficult question, but what do you think: is the situation going to improve?
Worker: It is difficult to say whether it is getting better or worse, but it looks to me that it's becoming worse.

Q: What is needed to bring about an improvement?
Worker: A joint agreement must be reached.

Q: Who should be party to this agreement?
Worker: Well, society itself, so that the state of emergency would cease. Now there is no agreement at all.

COMING:
Special Issue
The Agenda After Reagan.

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Q: Have there been steps in the right direction?
Worker: That depends on which side you mean.

Q: Have the authorities taken steps in the right direction?
Worker: Well, they said that by the end of December the people who had brought the country to its present state would be brought to account. But no one has been punished thus far. There is only one trial in progress of what's his name.

Q: Maciej Szczepanski. [Former head of the Polish radio and TV network, now on trial for charges of massive embezzlement and bribery.]
Worker: Yes, Szczepanski. And what about the others? What about Gierek and Jaroszewicz? What about them?

Q: They have been interned.
Worker: Well, I don't know about that; the television says nothing about it. The people who have ruined the country should be punished first, and the others should be dealt with later. This would be a good thing, and in this case society would look at things in a different way and would trust the party and the government. As things are now, I don't know.

Q: And whom do you trust?
Worker: I don't know whom I could trust right now.

Q: And what do you think about the future?
Worker: Perhaps I can escape to the West.

Q: Is that really your opinion?
Worker: No, I am just joking.

ABRAHAM BRUMBERG

Abraham Brumberg writes frequently for TNR on Soviet and East European affairs.

Lifting the curtain on Stockman's wizardry.

THE BUDGET OF OZ

BY BOWMAN CUTTER

THE OFFICE of Management and Budget should be ashamed of itself. The Reagan Administration's 1983 budget goes beyond voodoo economics—it's Oz economics. To believe in it would require the credulity of Dorothy herself, because, like the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Lion, this budget hasn't got a brain, it hasn't got a heart, and it hasn't got the courage of its own numbers. What it does have is a set of budgetary levers behind a flimsy curtain. The first step back toward reality is to lift that curtain.

I'll leave aside for the moment the question of whether or not big deficits are good for us, because we can't begin to deal with that question until we know just how big the deficits are going to be. Instead, I propose to take the reader on a guided tour of the yellow brick road—a tour that will show exactly why it is that the Administration's deficit numbers, huge as they are, are much smaller than an honest count would make them. By the time we get back to Kansas, it ought to be clear that these deficits will be, in fact, almost 50 percent higher than OMB admits.

Bowman Cutter is a former executive director for budget at the Office of Management and Budget.

Our tour will require looking at charts and at numbers. If you are one of those people whose eyes glaze over in the presence of such things, do not be alarmed. That is a perfectly normal reaction. Rest assured that I will explain those arcana. I apologize in advance for them, but the sad fact is that one can't analyze the budget without analyzing the budget.

The top half of Table 1 shows what the Administration says is going to happen. These numbers project the largest cumulative deficits in American history, but they are too low. Indeed, they are worthless. To understand why, we have to examine the budget in several different ways. Let's call these ways: (1) the anomalies; (2) the real economy; (3) the gimmicks; and (4) the policy reductions.

(1) *The anomalies.* In this category I would put two very large improbabilities in what the Administration is forecasting about spending. It is possible that these improbabilities will turn out to be true—just as it is possible that OMB has a pair of ruby red slippers that protect it from the Wicked Witch of the West. But I wouldn't bet on either proposition.

To begin with, the Reagan budget forecasts expendi-

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tures in 1982 of $725 billion, and in 1983 of $757 billion. This represents a 4.4 percent total increase in expenditures. The Congressional Budget Office, however, forecasts 1982 expenditures of $740 billion. At this point in the year, the CBO is normally better than OMB at estimating spending; but give OMB the benefit of the doubt and split the difference. This split gives us a spending pattern of $732 billion in 1982 and $757 billion in 1983, or a growth of 3.4 percent. How likely is even this?

Recent history would say: not very likely. In the past twenty years, the budget has grown at a rate this low only twice. The last time was in 1969 (when defense increased by less than 1 percent). In the last twelve budgets (eight Republican and four Democratic), growth averaged 11.3 percent. If I assume, just to pick a number, that Mr. Reagan can reduce budget growth by one-third below this twelve-year average, the 1983 budget would still grow by 7.5 percent. Total spending would be $787 billion—or $30 billion higher than the Administration projects.

DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Improbability number two. The Administration says that nondefense spending will actually go *down*, from $537 billion in 1982 to $536 billion in 1983. How often, you might ask, has nondefense spending declined in the last quarter-century? The answer: not once. The lowest rate of increase during that time was 4.8 percent in 1969. The average rate over the last twelve years was 13.6 percent. Even if the Administration cut this nondefense growth rate in half, spending would grow by $36 billion more than the Office of Management and Budget says it will.

Granted, these exercises don't "prove" anything, but they do show that the Reagan Administration is asserting that it can accomplish a degree and a mix of restraint in the 1983 budget that no other budget has come close to in the past twenty-five years. Maybe it can. But again, I wouldn't bet on it—and neither, it seems, would Wall Street. Let's look at what is more likely to happen.

(2) *The Real Economy.* The federal budget is tied to economic performance. If growth or inflation falls, so do revenues. If unemployment goes up, so do unemployment insurance payments. The magnitudes are large. A reduction of one percentage point in real growth can boost the deficit by $20 billion.

This is how the Administration got caught last year. To satisfy the claims of Reaganomics, it overestimated economic growth (by about five percentage points) and underestimated interest rates (by about three percentage points). Doubts about these forecasts were brushed aside as technical whining. The result? In a year when President Reagan got everything he asked for, the deficit this year will be two and one-half times the Administration's original estimate.

The same thing is happening for 1983. President Reagan is predicting economic growth 18 percent higher than the Congressional Budget Office's base projection and 73 percent higher than its pessimistic projection. Inflation is predicted to be 17 percent, and interest rates 20 percent, lower than the CBO's base case. For the four years from 1982 through 1985, Mr. Reagan projects average economic growth 32 percent *higher* than the CBO's base forecast, inflation 14.5 percent lower, and average interest rates 10 percent lower.

In every possible way, the Reagan forecast picks numbers that favor a smaller deficit. It envisions faster growth than anyone else believes likely (76 percent faster than the 1973 to 1980 average and 26 percent faster than the average from 1950 to 1970, a very good period in U.S. economic history). This high growth rate is to be accompanied by lower interest rates, lower inflation, and lower unemployment than anyone else believes possible.

A more likely economic course lies somewhere between the Congressional Budget Office's baseline projections and its pessimistic projections. (Caveat: If the policies in this budget are maintained, the course will be *below* the pessimistic projections.) Therefore the

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budget estimates need to be adjusted for reality. Giving the Administration an enormous benefit of the doubt, I'll use the CBO baseline as my forecast. See the "Real Economy" line of Table 2 for what a more reasonable economic forecast adds to the deficits. I think these figures are still a bit optimistic. But the effect of even these changes in economic assumptions is to alter the four-year pattern from one of moderately declining deficits to one of slowly rising deficits which never fall below $100 billion.

(3) *Gimmicks.* The Administration's budget builds into its numbers a variety of measures which suggest that someone at OMB wandered off the road and fell asleep in the poppy field. My favorites are these:

A proposal to increase Coast Guard fees. (Henceforth, the Coast Guard will charge for search and rescue missions. Don't go sailing without your American Express Card.)

A vigorous program of fraud, waste, and abuse prevention (unspecified) that will save $1 billion.

Federal property disposition (unspecified) that will rise from zero to $1 billion and then to $4 billion annually—and will stay there forever.

A trebling of revenues from outer continental shelf oil and gas leases—at a time when oil prices are declining. (The Administration must have credited itself with the present value of all conceivable future sales to get this result.)

Improved asset sale managment (unspecified) that will save $1 billion.

Withholding on interest and dividends—which the Administration has already backed away from. This is to bring in $2 billion a year.

Increased IRS enforcement (to be accomplished while IRS staff is declining) that will produce $2.4 billion a year.

Finally, for the chutzpah award of all time, "a $2.7-billion reduction in net interest reflecting the lower federal borrowing associated with the deficit reduction measures"—in other words, interest savings from the gimmicks themselves.

Silly things like these get into the budget toward the end of the process. It is January. David Stockman is nowhere near a deficit the President will live with. At a meeting somewhere in the Executive Office Building, people are getting giddy. Someone says, laughing, "We could always sell $4 billion worth of federal property, right?" Done and done.

Taken together, these and other gimmicks are supposed to reduce the deficit by $20.3 billion in 1983, $22.9 billion in 1984, and $19 billion in 1985. I'd be amazed if 5 percent of these "savings" were real, but I'll be generous and give them 20 percent of them. See the "Gimmicks" line of Table 2 for what this accommodation with reality adds to the deficits. The true dimensions of the problem are beginning to emerge.

(4) *The Policy Reductions.* Within this category, I group three kinds of policy proposals the Administration has made to reduce the potential deficit—entitlement savings, discretionary program savings, and tax increases. These alleged savings, shown in the bottom half of Table 1, add up to $70 billion by 1985.

The projected entitlement savings come largely from proposed reductions in Medicaid, food stamps, child nutrition assistance, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, and guaranteed student loans. These proposals are a mixed bag. Some of the kinds of changes that must be made—because until we find a way to impose some restraint upon these programs, we cannot solve the federal budget problem. Some are absurd. Others are extraordinarily unfair. The food stamp program, for example, is expensive. But it operates fairly well. It gets food to the poorest people in the country. A budget which cuts this program by 19 percent in real terms has turned the safety net into a tea strainer. Congress won't go along—not all the way, anyhow.

There are gimmicks buried in these numbers, too. First, the federal government, by fiat, will now reimburse only 98 percent of the amount of hospital bills. Either this will save 2 percent or it will cause hospitals to raise their bills by 2 percent. Which would you guess? Second, the federal government will require that state management of Medicaid be carried out with *no* administrative errors. Sounds wonderful, but it's just a way of shifting costs from the federal to the state level (yes, the new federalism). Third (and this one is a beauty), the Administration projects $4 billion in sav-

THE OZ BUDGET

(As projected by President Reagan and Mr. Stockman, in billions of dollars)

	1982	1983	1984	1985
OUTLAYS	$725.3	$757.6	$805.9	$868.5
RECEIPTS	626.8	666.1	723.0	796.6
DEFICITS	$ 98.5	$ 91.5	$ 82.9	$ 71.9

Projected Program Savings

	1983	1984	1985
ENTITLEMENTS	12.8%	18.1%	23.8%
DISCRETIONARY PROGRAMS	11.0	23.0	32.0
TAX INCREASES	7.2	13.5	13.5

(SOURCE: OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET)

Table 1.

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ings from lower farm supports. These are automatic payments related to farm prices. The only time they come down is when farm prices rise, generally because of bad weather. The Administration must be assuming the worst sustained bad weather since Noah.

I'll give the Administration 50 percent of these entitlement savings—which, given the average for such proposals and the fakery in these numbers, is pretty generous of me.

The discretionary program reductions the Administration has proposed this year and last year represent an as yet unrecognized but truly radical demolition job on the federal government. All in all, discretionary programs decline from 14 percent to 7.4 percent of the budget over four years. In dollars, the reduction is from $103 billion to $65 billion, a cut of 37 percent in nominal terms and 47 percent in real terms. From 1982 to 1985, basic research expenditures grow 4.1 percent annually, which is to say they fall in real terms. Natural resource and education expenditures each fall 10 percent annually. Transportation falls 2.5 percent annually. A similar drying up is proposed for just about every other discretionary program in the civilian budget.

THE KANSAS BUDGET

(As projected by Mr. Cutter, in billions of dollars)

	1982	1983	1984	1985
REAGAN DEFICITS	$ 98.6	$ 91.5	$ 82.9	$ 71.9
Adjustments:				
REAL ECONOMY	3.0	13.0	24.0	40.0
GIMMICKS	—	16.2	17.3	15.2
POLICY REDUCTIONS	—	13.0	26.0	36.0
REAL DEFICITS	$101.6	$133.7	$150.2	$163.1

(SOURCE: TOTO)

Table 2.

I'll give them 75 percent of the proposed reductions for 1983, but I don't think for a minute there is any chance that such a radical restructuring of government will be sustained over time. The discretionary figures, you see, hide another gimmick. The claimed savings rise from $11 billion to $32 billion over three years. But discretionary cuts do not rise automatically like this. The savings are for one year only, and they have to be refought each year. There is absolutely no way the Administration can find savings in this general discretionary category that rise by 150 percent in three years. I suspect that OMB backed into these figures and could not begin to show any detail for the alleged future savings. However, despite the fact that I don't believe any of it, I'll allow for 50 percent of the claimed 1984 and 1985 savings.

Finally, the Administration is proposing to reduce the deficit $7.5 billion in 1983 and $13 billion in 1985 by raising business taxes. I'll give them all of this, but I'm going to reduce tax receipt estimates for another reason. Even after allowing for the proposed business tax increases, the Administration has corporate taxes rising at 16 percent annually from 1982 to 1985. This estimate can only be considered fanciful. Remember that President Reagan's 1981 tax cut—the Economic Recovery Act of 1981—included both the largest corporate tax cut in history and a tax leasing provision that allows corporations to shelter taxes by purchasing tax benefits. I happen to think that the leasing provision is sensible public policy; but I also think it will cut far more into corporate taxes than the Administration's numbers show. These corporate receipt estimates are just not going to happen. I do not know how much lower they will be, but it seems reasonable to expect a 5 percent reduction. Even this adjustment, by the way, leaves us with the highest corporate taxes of the eight-year period from 1978 through 1985.

The "Policy Reductions" line in Table 2 shows what gets added when the Administration's projected entitlement and discretionary savings and its projected tax increases are corrected for reality. The line below that—holy of holies, the bottom line—shows what I believe the real deficits in the Administration's budget are likely to be. They constitute a gigantic budgetary balloon—as big a balloon as the one the Wizard used to go back to Kansas, where he presumably reopened his medicine show and, unlike the rest of us, lived happily ever after.

In conclusion—well, in conclusion, I hardly know where to begin.

First, these recalculated potential deficits, which I believe to be a far more accurate representation of the Administration's budget than its own figures, are an economic disaster waiting to happen. The four deficits from 1982 through 1985 add up to $446 billion, about the same as the total of all deficits from 1789 to 1975. More important, these deficits rise as a proportion of the gross national product from 2 percent to about 4 percent in 1985, the highest since the end of World War II. This is crowding out with a vengeance. It is entirely appropriate to argue that the budget need not be in balance at all points in the business cycle, or that increased savings allow an economy to accommodate higher deficits. But the potential deficits in this budget overwhelm these arguments. They would soak up most of any conceivable increase in savings, and would guarantee continuing high interest rates for a very long time. (See "The Budget and the Bust," by John Kenneth Galbraith, TNR, March 17.) Kiss goodbye any capital investment boom.

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Second, these potential deficits explain much about the current economic scene. Why did interest rates skyrocket in the spring of 1981, forcing the economy into a recession? Why have interest rates gone back up now, in a time of slack industrial demand, falling national income, and declining inflation? Why are real interest rates—nominal interest rates minus inflation—at a high point in our history? Why does the Federal Reserve Board persist in a tight monetary policy in the middle of an economic recession? Why? Because the market—if you'll forgive a somewhat mysterious personification—is scared to death of the real deficits in this budget. No one likes to invest at one interest rate, then discover that the federal deficit has doubled, and then watch his investment go down the drain as interest rates rise. So money is held back, reducing the supply of funds available; interest rates rise anyway; and more investment is choked off.

Third, uncertainty makes everything worse. The 1983 budget creates the unmistakable impression that the Administration does not intend to deal with reality. The prospect of a high deficit scares the market; the prospect of a higher *and unacknowledged* deficit terrifies it.

The Reagan Administration and Congress can't afford to spend the next year shadow-boxing with the wrong deficit. The deficit for 1983 is not $91.5 billion, it's closer to $130 billion. We are in the middle of the worst budget mess of the last forty years, and this disastrous budget makes matters worse in every conceivable way. It's time for President Reagan and Mr. Stockman to bid farewell to the Emerald City. They should take this budget back to Kansas and start all over again.

Want is making a comeback.

The War On The Poor

By Nick Kotz

IT SOUNDED like a dry exercise in bookkeeping, a clerkly transfer of bureaucratic functions: "A financially equal swap." An exchange "with no winners and no losers." Those were the terms in which Ronald Reagan described to state legislators the centerpiece of his new federalism—a plan whereby the fifty states would take full responsibility for food stamps and welfare, and, in a fair exchange, Washington would take complete charge of Medicaid.

Similar assurances accompanied the proposed 1983 budget cuts in aid to the poor. "Don't be fooled by those who proclaim that spending cuts will deprive the elderly, the needy, the helpless," the President warned. What may appear to be budget reductions are really only part of "a slowdown in the rate of federal spending." In fact, he emphasized, the highest priority in his budget, along with national defense, is to redirect resources toward "a reliable safety net of social programs for those who have contributed and those who are in need."

However Mr. Reagan softens these two Presidential initiatives with his own aura of goodwill, one fact is still clear. Ronald Reagan's long-stated goal has been a dramatic dismantling of federal social welfare, shifting to the states the responsibility for the basic survival needs of the poor. And that is his aim, both in the 1983 budget cuts, and in his accompanying plan for turning Aid to Families with Dependent Children, food stamps, and dozens of other programs over to the states. To comprehend what the President is proposing, and to separate reality from rhetoric, one must focus on both the 1983 budget and the new federalism. Taken together, these Reagan proposals represent a radical revamping of national social policy. More than that, they represent an *abandonment* of the national social policy that has been evolving since the beginning of the New Deal half a century ago. As Senator Alan Cranston, Democrat of California, describes it, the Reagan program is "a prescription for abdicating our national commitment to meeting the most basic human needs of our poor, disabled, elderly citizens, and our children of tomorrow."

At the very least, the Reagan plans represent a clear rejection of a long-held Republican doctrine about social welfare: that it should be designed to help people help themselves, to encourage the work ethic, and to encourage an end to dependency. The Reagan budget cuts hit hardest at the so-called "working poor," those families whose breadwinners perform the

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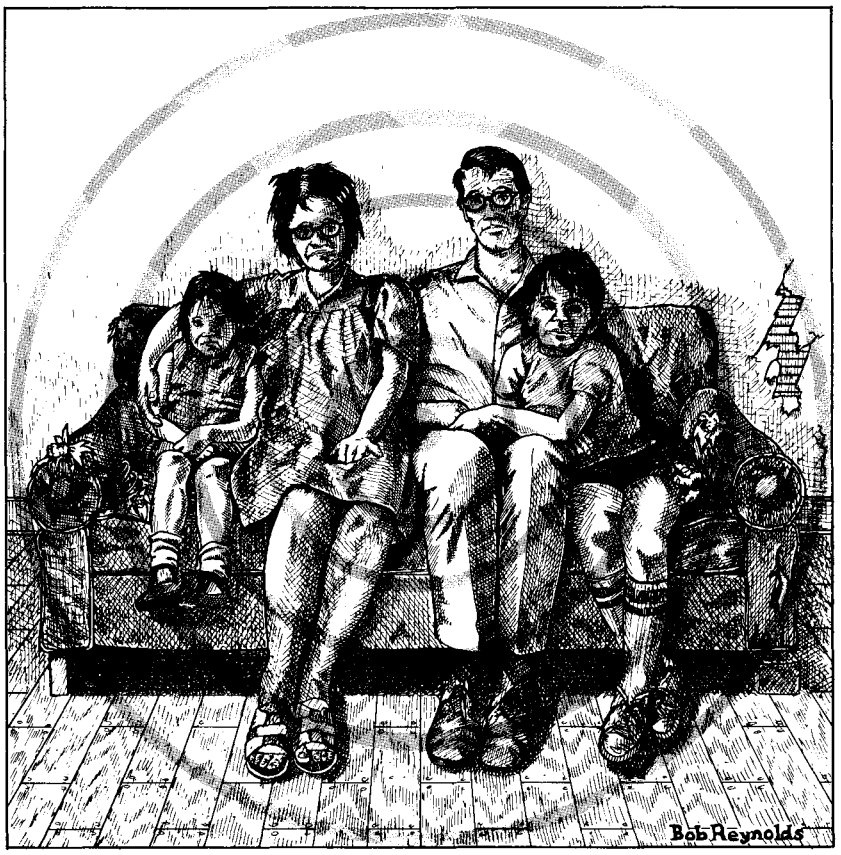
least desirable jobs in American society at the lowest pay, and are scraping by—toward the day they or their children can get ahead—only with the help of minimal government assistance. Buried under layers of myth about self-perpetuating welfare dependency is the fact that during the 1960s and 1970s hundreds of thousands of families *escaped* from poverty and the dole with the help of federal welfare, food, education, job training, and health programs.

The President's recommendations promise to have significant long-term consequences. If the budget cuts and social program transfers are adopted, if tax reductions go fully into effect as scheduled, and if the Pentagon budget increases are approved, it will take a generation to reorder sufficient taxes and revenues to return the nation to a more generous social policy.



DRAWING BY BOB REYNOLDS FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

In presenting his $755-billion budget, with its $91-billion deficit, the President stressed that it only slowed the growth rate of federal social spending. But the cuts set forth in the budget documents for fiscal year 1983 belie that statement as it applies to the major programs that serve the poor. These programs—ranging from AFDC and food stamps to training programs and low-income housing—would be slashed 18 percent from their present levels. (See table on page 20.)

Most of these cuts come on top of earlier budget cuts recommended by Mr. Reagan and approved by Congress for 1982. And many are compounded by their interacting effect on the same poor people, thousands of whom benefit from a combination of federal aid programs. Millions of needy Americans, particularly the aged and working poor, would lose all their assistance or have it cut sharply.

Furthermore, grants in aid to the states are cut so sharply ($3.5 billion in 1982 and $9.8 billion in 1983) that governors are wondering how much would be left of programs which Mr. Reagan proposes "turning back" to the states. Governor James Thompson, Republican of Illinois, says of the new federalism, "The 1983 budget is absolutely critical to this whole thing." Governor Richard Snelling, Republican of Vermont and chairman of the National Governors' Association, adds: "These cuts would fall heavily on many of the nation's needy citizens and would shift unacceptable burdens to state and local governments already struggling with the recession and deep 1982 federal aid reductions." At their recent association meeting in Washington, the governors, with near unanimity, opposed the notion of the states' taking on AFDC and food stamp responsibilities. They also strongly opposed the proposed nearly $10-billion cut in aid to the states.

The President justified budget reductions in entitlement programs such as AFDC and food stamps by declaring that their growth "has far outstripped increases in basic indicators of need" and has become "a major source of persistent deficits, excessive taxes, and of poor economic performance."

The government's own statistics and studies tell another story. These programs and others which primarily help poor people comprise only 7 to 10 percent of the budget, yet they have been singled out for far heavier cuts than any other government activity. As for "outstripping increases in basic indicators of need," the AFDC program is providing 24 percent less aid, adjusted for inflation, than it did in 1969. And the food stamp program, with its 43-cents-a-meal "thrifty diet," lags two years behind soaring increases in the cost of food. In contrast to the 18 percent cut in programs for the poor, the Reagan budget proposes only a 1.5 percent reduction in the $290-billion-a-year array of entitlement programs (Social Security, Medicare, veterans' disability, and military, civil service, and railroad retirement) primarily serving the non-poor.

This pattern has led to criticisms like that of the *Miami Herald*, which charged in an editorial that the President is using the poor "as cannon fodder in a holy

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war against inflation and big government." Anticipating such attacks, the President advised Americans to ignore "horror stories about people who are going to be thrown out in the snow." But the stories abound, and they are not, as the President would like us to believe, fabrications. The results of the much less severe 1982 cuts can be seen at soup kitchens and other communal feeding centers throughout the country. At a food program for the elderly operated in a synagogue in northwest Washington, D.C., a worker notes an influx of elderly white people whose food stamps have been cut. They are using what meager cash they have to buy medicine. They can no longer afford enough food. Relief agencies throughout the country are reporting requests for assistance from a new kind of supplicant: intact families in which one or both breadwinners have lost their jobs, their supplemental food stamps, or AFDC assistance.

Those food programs that were created or expanded in the late 1960s and early 1970s—after it was discovered that millions of Americans, because they lacked sufficient income to buy food, suffered from malnutrition or outright hunger—have been singled out for particularly severe cuts. The 1983 Reagan budget calls for slashes in each of these programs, and the new federalism foresees elimination of a direct federal role in all of them except the school lunch program. A dozen different studies have credited these programs with dramatic reductions in hunger and malnutrition, and with contributing to improved health among the poor.

The Women, Infants and Children program, which provides $950 million for medically prescribed food aid supplements for two million women and young children who are at nutritional risk, would be eliminated. Its funding, reduced by more than a third, would be folded into a block grant in which the money could be used for other purposes. States, already hard-pressed financially, for the first time would have to match federal funds. At least 700,000 people would lose benefits in a program that has long waiting lists and a record which documents contributions to lower infant mortality and mental retardation, and to improve health.

The school breakfast and child care center feeding programs also would be eliminated, with their previous funding reduced by 50 percent and combined into a block grant to the states. These cuts in food aid would gouge even deeper into the programs in subsequent years, because funding would be frozen at $488 million. Hundreds of thousands of poor children would lose their free school breakfasts. Reductions would be sharper in child care center feeding, the losers being poor children and working mothers who depend on low-cost day care.

Proposed cuts in the food stamp program would eliminate benefits entirely for three million people and reduce aid for fifteen million others. Sixty percent of those losing benefits are members of families whose total income is already 50 percent below the government poverty line. The working poor, no longer permitted an 18 percent deduction for work expenses and taxes, would lose $2 out of every $5 in food stamp aid, an average yearly family loss of $684. A family earning $5,000 a year would end up receiving $400 less in food stamps than a family subsisting entirely on $5,000 a year in welfare. Senator Patrick Leahy, Democrat of Vermont and a member of the Senate nutrition subcommittee, notes that this kind of budget cutting encourages "people to stop working and go on welfare."

The elderly would lose $1 out of $4 in present benefits, for an average annual loss of $192 per family. An elderly couple living on $425 a month in Social Security benefits would have its annual food stamp benefits reduced from $312 to $120. If these older

THE REAGAN CUTS

	Present budget (billions)	Proposed budget (billions)	Percent reduction
AFDC	$ 6.6	$ 5.5	16.7
FOOD STAMPS	11.8	9.6	18.6
MEDICAID	19.0	17.0	10.5
CHILD NUTRITION	3.0	2.7	10.0
SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME	9.2	8.9	3.1
LOW-INCOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE	1.8	1.3	25.8
COMPENSATORY EDUCATION	2.9	1.9	34.5
TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT	4.0	2.2	46.2
COMMUNITY SERVICE GRANTS	0.35	0.15	56.7
LOW-INCOME HOUSING	7.9	7.4	6.3

Note: These proposed budget cuts for actual 1983 outlays in some cases understate markedly the cuts in aid. For example, the Reagan proposal virtually wipes out the low-income housing program with the long-term effect of a 130 percent reduction in housing aid. The figure exceeds 100 percent because the Administration is also calling for rescinding previously voted budget authority.

(SOURCES: OMB/CBO/CENTER ON BUDGET AND POLICY PRIORITIES)

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people also were receiving $30 a month in fuel aid, their food stamps would be eliminated. And if they were living in government-assisted housing, their food stamp benefits, which will now be counted as income, could result in a sharp increase in rent.

Benefit losses are even more severe for families who had been living on earnings from minimum-wage jobs, supplemented by AFDC payments. In most states, 1982 budget cuts have already eliminated all AFDC support for a mother of three children who earns as much as $5,000 a year. These families also lost their eligibility for Medicaid. Many may now be better off financially by quitting their jobs or greatly reducing their working hours. The 1983 budget calls for eliminating the Work Incentive Training program, through which hundreds of thousands of AFDC recipients have received training and job placement. Instead, states can require welfare recipients to participate in "workfare," earning their AFDC checks in unpaid work at public jobs. (See "Parasites Lost," by Timothy Noah, TNR, June 27, 1981.)

THOSE MEASURES are not the result of quirks in the budget-cutting process. President Reagan has advocated similar ideas for years, encouraged by Martin Anderson, until recently his chief domestic policy adviser, and by Robert B. Carleson, now his special assistant for policy development and formerly his state welfare director in California. These two longtime advisers share Reagan's view that programs which permit workers to receive welfare or food supplements are too expensive and philosophically unsound. Their approach is to make government assistance so scarce and so unattractive—low benefits and unpaid labor—that potential recipients will have no choice but to get by on whatever work is available at whatever wage. The President explained the idea recently: "If you start paying people to be poor, you are going to have a lot of poor people."

The new federalism represents an extension of the strategy of the budget cuts: shrink federal social welfare and then place responsibility with the states, where it is certain to shrink further. In addition to the swap—AFDC and food stamps to the states, Medicaid to the federal government—Washington would "turn back" to the states responsibility for forty federal programs in education, social services, community development, and transportation. To pay for them, the President would create a $28-billion "federalism trust fund," collected from federal excise taxes on alcohol, cigarettes, and telephone service, and one-half the federal tax on gasoline. When the trust fund and federal excise taxes are phased out in 1991, the states can enact their own excise taxes to pay for their new responsibilities. (Excise taxes, however, do not provide a reliable, growing source of revenue, since they are based on units sold, not cost. Such taxes are also far more regressive than the income tax, and they are hard for a state to enact—particularly if neighboring states do not.)

Under the sketchy proposal announced in the President's State of the Union message, and amplified somewhat since then, many crucial details are left unsettled. But the direction of the program is clear: welfare responsibilities would be given to the states to deal with as they see fit—if they see fit. As a practical matter, states would have great latitude in deciding the range of benefits, or whether to continue programs at all.

REALLOCATING GOVERNMENT responsibilities within the federal system to achieve greater simplicity, efficiency, and accountability is an idea that has broad appeal. Disagreement arises over the all-important details. In President Reagan's view, the transfer of AFDC and welfare to the states "will make welfare less costly and more responsible to genuine need because it will be designed and administered closer to the grass roots and the people it serves." Governor Bruce Babbitt of Arizona, perhaps the most prominent Democratic advocate of giving the states wider latitude, disagrees. "These programs are properly a national responsibility," Mr. Babbitt says. "When the unemployment rate is 16 percent in Michigan, but only 5.5 percent in Texas, it is manifestly unfair to ask Michigan residents to shoulder welfare burdens created by national economic policies. The safety net ought to be fashioned as a matter of integrated national policy equally applicable to an elderly citizen or malnourished child whether he lives in Maine, Mississippi, or Arizona."

Philosophical differences aside, the evidence strongly suggests that the proposed exchange would not be a "financially equal swap with no winners and no losers." In theory, the federal government would be assuming about $16 billion of state Medicaid costs and the states would pick up a similar amount of federal AFDC and food stamp costs. But the dynamics of the new arrangement virtually guarantee that poor people will be losers. Both the state and federal governments will be drawn irresistibly toward cutting the benefits of all three programs now offered in most states. Any states that resist a reduction of benefits to the poor would almost immediately face higher costs than in the present arrangement.

The Reagan Administration has talked about "maintenance of effort" by the states, requiring them for at least several years to spend as much on food and welfare functions as was spent in the past. But this safeguard would offer only limited protection to the poor. At present, food stamps is a national program with uniform national standards, fully financed by the federal government but administered locally by the states. AFDC is a cooperative program, in which the individual states set their own entitlement standards, but the federal government pays 50 to 70 percent of the

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costs. Medicaid is a joint program, in which both the individual states and Washington have some voice in setting entitlement standards, and the federal government pays 50 to 70 percent of the costs. The key issue is what would happen to benefit levels and costs when states assumed full responsibility for food stamps and AFDC, and the federal government full responsibility for Medicaid.

With all its imperfections, the food stamp program today is the sturdiest safety net available to all needy Americans. In contrast to Social Security, AFDC, Medicaid, and veterans' benefits, the only qualification is need, defined by the national poverty line ($8,450 annual income for a nonfarm family of four, $5,690 for a couple). Benefits are available to the elderly, intact families, single parents with children, single persons, and couples without children. Uniform benefits are adjusted periodically to reflect the cost of living. The 21 million participants represent a broad cross section of the poor. Food stamp households have an average gross income of $325 a month; more than half have no liquid assets and half do not own a car.

Food stamps were expanded into this uniform, national program specifically because many states did not make the earlier program available to people in obvious need. As late as the early 1970s, hundreds of counties, including ones with the worst problems of poverty-related malnutrition, refused to operate programs. Other states provided inadequate benefits to only a small percentage of their poor. It is difficult to imagine how any state today would run a food stamp program on its own: printing and distributing its own stamps, authorizing and policing food stores, safeguarding stamps from counterfeiting, etc. For individual states to take on these responsibilities, now borne by the federal government, would involve prohibitive administrative costs and burdens. It seems inevitable that states would eliminate the food stamp program, and increase welfare checks to offset at least partially the loss of food stamps, for at least some of the present food stamp recipients. But then the states would run into a whole new set of difficult issues involving costs and welfare policy.

CARTOON BY BEN SARGENT

The vast majority of states, in their present AFDC welfare programs, exclude thousands of current food stamp recipients from eligibility. Half the states do not provide benefits to intact families, and none provides benefits to single people or childless couples. Furthermore, the AFDC benefit and eligibility levels in many states are far more restrictive than national standards of the food stamp program. A number of states provide benefits only to families at or below 50 percent of the poverty line. Unless states broadened their eligibility standards and raised their benefits, millions of persons now receiving food stamps would lose their food benefits and receive nothing in return.

ACCORDING TO President Reagan, the states are up to meeting this challenge, thanks to civil rights and reapportionment laws introduced over the past twenty years. Those laws have made profound differences, but a vast disparity remains between the national standards of food stamp aid, determined in the White House and Congress, and AFDC standards in the various states. (See "Reagan's Articles of Confederation," TNR, February 10.) In Mississippi, a mother and two children with no other income receive a maximum AFDC grant of $96 a month. In Texas, a family of four receives a maximum of $141—or $38 less than that oil-rich state paid in benefits 12 years ago. In Arizona, a family of four receives $244, based on a standard of need last updated 10 years ago. Twenty-two states provide maximum benefits of less than $285 a month (or less than 50 percent of the poverty line). Since 1970, only two states have increased benefits as much as the inflation rate, while more than half the states have failed to reflect even one half of the increase in the cost of living.

It is the food stamp program, with its single national standard of need and regular updating of benefits, which has helped ease the disparities among states. Since food stamp benefits are tied to income, recipients in states with low AFDC benefits—or low wage levels—receive more food stamps than do recipients in higher benefit states. To pick the most extreme example, in Mississippi, a family of four receives the rock-bottom AFDC payment of $120 a month, but gets $235 in food stamps. Beyond any question, the food stamp program has revolutionized the standard of living for the poorest people in that poorest of American states.

Even when the states are relieved of their Medicaid costs, there is little reason to suppose that many of them will extend welfare coverage or raise benefits and update them periodically to achieve the same level of coverage provided by a combination of AFDC and the federal food stamp program. In fact, the evidence suggests that the elimination of federal financial support will lead to a reduction in welfare benefits. At present, with Washington paying 50 to 70 percent of

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the costs, states have had some motivation to raise even the most inadequate ADFC benefits. With more popular and powerful constituencies competing for limited state resources, it is difficult to envision states raising benefits, which for the first time will be fully dependent on state funds.

Relinquishing the federal role in AFDC and food stamps could hurt the poor in other ways as well. The needy will lose federal procedural rights to apply for aid and to get a hearing before aid is cut off. These rights to benefits with a federal component have been developed painstakingly by Legal Services lawyers and advocates of the poor over the last twenty years. In the past, many states and local jurisdictions gave or withheld aid with little regard to fairness and few procedural safeguards for the poor.

The net effect of the AFDC and food stamp transfer to the states would likely be an evaporation of whatever semblance of national standards have been set by food stamps. More people will move from low-benefit states to those which provide more generously for the unemployed and the needy. President Reagan will have created a welfare system directly contrary to the system envisioned in the national welfare reform efforts of the Nixon Administration in the early 1970s. Back then, Ronald Reagan was one of the few governors who opposed national welfare reform; he was advocating the same states-centered approach he has introduced today.

SOMEWHAT IRONICALLY, the federalization of Medicaid also is likely to result in a distinct pattern of "winners and losers." At present, Medicaid eligibility requirements and the level of services differ greatly among the states. Twenty states use their own widely varying AFDC eligibility standards for Medicaid as well. Thirty states permit participation by the "medically needy" who have slightly higher income. Some states provide for "optional services," such as prescription drugs, eyeglasses, and dental care, while others do not. If Medicaid is operated as an entirely federal program, it would seem inconceivable, and probably unconstitutional, for such differences to be permitted. The federal government could hardly operate a national program in which, as at present, a family of four in California can get Medicaid if its annual income is below $7,800, but a similar family in Arkansas qualifies only if its income is below $3,100.

If the federal government set national Medicaid eligibility standards and benefits at the level of the more generous states, such as California, New York, and Massachusetts, the total yearly cost of the program would rise by some $14 billion—an unlikely objective for the Reagan Administration. It is much more probable that some middling standard would be set, by which needy citizens would receive improved coverage in the most limited benefit states, but fewer benefits in the more generous states. If these higher-benefit states decided to supplement federal Medicaid, they might be big losers in the "financially equal swap."

In making his recommendations, the President invited his critics "to put up or shut up." The most logical response to his new federalism proposal would be a different kind of trade, one in which the federal government keeps food stamps and takes over Medicaid and/or AFDC, and the states assume responsibility for less basic kinds of aid. But this would not be an equal swap financially, nor would Mr. Reagan buy it. So the present prospect is for trench warfare over which budgets get cut how much, and how much of last year's tax bonanza stays on the books.

THE BIGGEST DANGER is that Mr. Reagan's planned destruction of basic support systems for the needy will be carried out in the same atmosphere of haste, public ignorance, lack of debate, and political expediency that surrounded last year's budget cuts. The poor no longer have a strong voice in Washington, as they did in the heyday of the civil rights and antipoverty movements. More than anything else, the poor need advocates who can effectively take their case to the public. As a recent Opinion Research Poll showed, 38 percent of the public puts a high priority on cutting "welfare," but only 9 percent would cut "aid to the needy."

In off-the-cuff remarks in recent weeks, Mr. Reagan has continued to evoke a cheerful mythology about the problems of being poor in America. People who want to work can find pages of job openings listed in the newspapers. The hungry can eat by gleaning leftovers from the fields. Donations from food manufacturers can fill the gap. Poverty can be ended if each church would adopt ten families. Ronald Reagan has been purveying this kind of mythology, along with stories about the welfare queen from Chicago (his current example: the pupil who receives a free lunch and whose parents earn $72,000 a year), since his 1950s stint as a goodwill speaker for General Electric. Myths persist because people find it useful or comforting to spread them and believe them.

President Reagan wants to have policies that make poor people suffer, but he also wants to maintain his good-guy image. That is why, one recent day, he phoned a television anchorman to find how the federal government might help an elderly couple who had been shown losing their home because of an unpaid tax assessment. As it happens, it was a lawyer from the Legal Services program who had brought the couple's plight to the public attention, and is now fighting to save their home.

In the real world, one thing the President might do is reconsider his commitment to abolish that program. As the lawyer said, "I'm gratified he called and has compassion for them, but I'd like him to come down here and see how much misery his policies have caused."

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STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Fine Farce, Dreary Drama

Victor/Victoria
(Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer)

I'm Dancing As Fast As I can
(Paramount)

Allow for a mediocre opening, ten minutes or so. Forgive some splatters of banality throughout. *Victor/Victoria* is the best American film farce I've seen since *Some Like It Hot* (1959).

Blake Edwards, the author-director, has had a career ranging from cold to tepid: of his last two pictures, *10* was unbearable, *S.O.B.* was bearable. Julie Andrews, the star of the new film (who is Mrs. Edwards), has been more consistent: her career has been generally tepid, although one could see her struggling to keep up with the *Zeitgeist*. She moved from *Mary Poppins* in 1964 to button poppin's in 1981, when she bared her breasts in *S.O.B.* Her co-stars, Robert Preston and James Garner, are solid, likable actors, ebullient and understated respectively, but not unfailing harbingers of joy. Putting them all together, with the foreknowledge that *Victor/Victoria* is a farce involving homosexuality and transvestism, I hoped for the passable.

And passably it begins. Paris, 1934. Preston, an aging American queen who performs in a nightclub, goes to the club one day and by chance hears the audition of an English soprano, Andrews. She sings a corny old recital piece, "Cherry Ripe," so we know at once that (a) she is going to flunk the audition, and (b) later on she will sing differently. Preston gets fired that night because of a fight during a performance involving a young male lover of his (the first of several tedious brawls). In a restaurant he runs into Andrews, eating voraciously though broke, and they become friends by beating the restaurant bill together. (Another brawl.) After that, the film picks up considerably, and, for the most part, stays up. The only real sags are those occasional brawls, allegedly comic, which occur mostly so that Preston and, later, Garner can prove they are not cowards though gay or suspected of it. Fights as fun have always bored me, since long before Victor McLaglen. In one fight here, Edwards even includes the chestnut of having someone knocked onto a piano and collapsing it.

But there's paradoxical virtue in this boredom: these *Victor/Victoria* fights are especially wearying because they are so out of key with the rest of the script, which, like all the acting, is clever. Preston hatches a scheme to make Andrews a success. He cuts her hair, dresses her in men's clothes, and "sells" her to a club manager as a Polish count who does female impersonations—a woman playing a man playing a woman. (*Rosenkavalier* fans, remember Octavian.)

Andrews is a hit, performing as a woman (and singing better than she has done in some time), then, for her curtain call, pulling off her wig to reveal her "real" male self. Garner, a Chicago gangster visiting Paris, is smitten by Andrews when she sings, then is disturbed at the finish to discover that he has been attracted by, as he thinks, a man. (*Twelfth Night* fans, remember Orsino's liking for Cesario who is Viola in disguise.) Really funny complications follow, ingeniously convoluted.

The actors, under Edwards's direction, keep the ninepins twirling. I've never been an Andrews devotee, but there's less suburban-night-out giddiness here, more genuine verve and sex, than I've seen in her. Preston plays the bewigged old gay with comic verism, not cartoon; he makes his gayness his being, an amusing being. If you've seen Garner in the Polaroid commercials, let alone his many films and TV shows, you've seen him, and that's not a knock: he knows how to play quiet, quizzical comedy. Edwards even takes the stalest cliché in twentieth-century farce, the sexy dumb blonde with a nasal accent, and gets some vital use out of her because Lesley Ann Warren plays her—Garner's moll at the start—as if the character had just been invented.

The musical numbers, and there are at least half a dozen, are staged with that cinematic luxe that only the Folies-Bergère could have afforded, but they're well-designed by Rodger Maus and Patricia Norris, rightly choreographed by Paddy Stone, and well lighted by Dick Bush. The songs by Leslie Bricusse and Henry Mancini strike the right balance: they seem both "period" and fresh.

I began thinking of *Some Like It Hot* about halfway through *Victor/Victoria* because, first, I was laughing so much; because of the period (a few years later than Billy Wilder's film); because of the transvestism (though Wilder had no homosexuality); because of the Chicago-gangster element; because of the musical numbers used to advance the story. Afterward, when I read the credits, the relation between the two films was italicized. Wilder's film was based on a German film of the early 1930s. *Victor/Victoria* was based on a German film of 1933 called *Viktor und Viktoria*, subject by Hans Hoemburg, written and directed by Reinhold Schünzel. (It was also made

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Arthur. John Gielgud, for whose too-brief appearances I endure *Brideshead Revisited*, walks off with this comedy as a pungent, pained manservant.

The French Lieutenant's Woman. Meryl Streep and Jeremy Irons excel in this double-stranded sententious script about Victorian lovers and the modern actors who play them.

My Dinner With André. Table-talk of André Gregory, an avant-garde director, and Wallace Shawn, a playwright, that goes far beyond the theater. No revelations of wisdom, just the pleasure of continuous interest.

Reds. This politics-as-romance story of John Reed and Louise Bryant overcomes its sentimental bumps with sheer narrative vigor and good performances.

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in French as *Georges et Georgette* and was remade in Germany in 1957. Schünzel himself acted and directed in Hollywood during the Hitler years.) The cozily cynical naughtiness, the easy acceptance of behavior that would startle the bourgeoisie, the flowering of elegant comic complications out of poverty, all give a "continental" base to both Wilder's and Edwards's film, mixed with American technical polish. (The combination doesn't *always* work: Wilder's latest, the dismal *Buddy Buddy*, came from a French farce.) For at least a hundred years, a lot of European dramaturgic ingenuity has gone into the fabrication of sophisticated, clever comedy, and some American filmmakers—or filmmakers in America, anyway—like Wilder and Lubitsch and now Edwards have harvested bits of it.

Not knowing Schünzel's film, I don't know how much of the plotting here is Edwards's, how much of the daring on the subject of gayness, or whether he devised the good running gags, like the suspicious waiter, the stolid private detective, and the man repeatedly trying to leave his shoes outside his hotel-room door. But the neat dialogue is surely Edwards's—as are the anachronisms: nobody said "Have a nice day" or "I'll buy that" (meaning "I'll accept that") in 1934.

THAT RAISES ONE other possible anachronism. This, as readers must have noted, is the third big U.S. production to come along this month on the subject of homosexuality. It's a far better film than either the sentimental *Making Love* or the bloated *Personal Best*. But they were contemporary. *Victor/Victoria* is set in 1934, and I'm wondering whether some of the things said about gays in this film aren't out of synch. (Only Garner and his Chicago friends are disturbed by gayness.) Not knowing Schünzel's film, I'm wondering whether some *Cage aux Folles* ambience hasn't been imposed retroactively.

But even if that's the case, it doesn't hurt the fun. And Edwards, like Wilder before him, at least chose a good antecedent, then adapted it well. What's more, he has directed it with a fine sense of farce timing—which does not mean frantic rush. (Note the handling of the finger caught in the closet door, for instance.) Edwards's experience with farce, especially the *Pink Panther* series, is the ground for a lot of what he does here; but in *Victor/Victoria* he zooms far above that ground.

If you want to see immense close-ups of: a pocketbook, an ash tray, a toilet, valium pills, a kitchen sink, shoes, a tea kettle, and much much more, then don't miss *I'm Dancing As Fast As I Can*. This is the film debut of Jack Hofsiss, who directed *The Elephant Man* well on stage and poorly on TV; he seems so awestruck by the power of the camera that he can't help pushing our faces into things we can see clearly enough as it is.

He also pushes our faces into the face of Jill Clayburgh. One of the several reasons this is a mistake is because of her oppressive lisp: she says "f" for "s." There's really no special need to be so close to her when she complains bitterly, "I feel like a bar of foap."

The script is by that laborious juvenile of a playwright, David Rabe (Clayburgh's husband), who also produced. It was adapted from the autobiography

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of Barbara Gordon, a TV documentary producer. We see how this woman, successful and proud (she says) of her vocation, suffers anxiety symptoms and gobbles valium while under a psychiatrist's care. Her lover induces her to stop valium and quit the doctor; she then goes through withdrawal symptoms, loses mental balance, is hospitalized, recovers and goes back to work. (What happens to the stupid and brutal lover is not shown.)

Gordon has been making a documentary about a woman dying of cancer, which her bosses make her finish with a happy shot on a beach. This revolts the cancerous woman who wants the film to be truthful. This patient, somewhat unbalanced, comes to visit Gordon when *she* is hospitalized and tells her that the picture ought to end with a shot of *her*, Gordon, on the beach. The patient dies, and the film does end with the requested shot. Thus the interior film is as pointless as the film enclosing it. All we are shown is the breakdown and recovery of a successful woman. Nothing we see relates to her life, her past, her realignment of herself in relation to them: it's just the chronicle of some events that are supposed to entrance, by being shown graphically—Clayburgh drooling, for instance.

To me, Clayburgh is a naturalistic ham. She seems to be constantly summoning up her powers to appear not to be acting, just as ostentatiously as, a century ago, a ham actor would have summoned up powers to look theatrical. This reaction of mine is exacerbated by the fact that I find her personality and person unappealing. Nicol Williamson plays her lover—a thankless role but not, I guess, an unsalaried one. Geraldine Page is the patient and, in style, is somewhere between Clayburgh and the nineteenth-century—in other words, Actors Studio acting. She continually *reveals* her techniques as she strives theatrically for the untheatrical.

ROBERT BRUSTEIN ON THEATER

Unsound Breeze From the Sound

John Guare is escalating his ambitions. Hitherto content to create whimsical semiabsurdist comedies about lovable eccentrics, he is currently at work on what appears to be a dramatic epic concerning the development of American moral life after the Civil War.

Lydie Breeze
by John Guare

Route 1 & 9
by the Wooster Group

Lydie Breeze at the American Place Theater is the first in the series, directed by the filmmaker Louis Malle; two more are scheduled to follow this season at the Manhattan Theater Club, directed by the filmmaker Karel Reisz. The last native playwright to embark on a project of comparable scale was Eugene O'Neill, who conceived an eleven-play cycle designed to describe the whole arc of our national history (*A Touch of the Poet* and the incomplete *More Stately Mansions* were the only works in this "Big Grand Opus" to survive). Attempts to compose such dramatic sagas are as rare these days as efforts to write the Great American Novel, and understandably so. What should one do—admire Guare's audacity or worry over his momentary loss of reason?

The latter, alas; to judge by *Lydie Breeze*, the task of encapsulating historical material within a theatrical anecdote has grown even more problematic today than in the time of O'Neill. The play is a potted mess, a crazy compound of mismatched styles, clumsy plotting, unconvincing characters, and half-digested history. Guare still brings his unfailing bounce and good nature to such lugubrious subjects as murder, suicide, death, and disease, but here his tone is at war with his intentions, as if he were featuring Bugs Bunny in an animated version of *War and Peace*. Worse, he has not so much dramatized his play as willed it into being before its time. For long periods, we seem to be listening to a recitation of confused plot ideas and character sketches.

The only thing that seems to unite these strands is syphilis. Everybody either has it, or gets it from someone else. Lydie Breeze (she doesn't appear in this play, having hanged herself some years before) was infected by her lover, Dan Grady, then transmitted the disease, in revenge, to his thirteen-year-old son, Jeremiah. Jeremiah, in turn, gave it to Beaty, Lydie's Irish servant, after convincing her he was Amos Mason, a former war comrade of Dan and Lydie's husband, Joshua. Joshua doesn't have syphilis because he hasn't slept with his wife since he cured Dan's syphilis by killing him in a fit of jealousy. When the play begins, it is 1895. Amos is now a senator, being groomed for President by William Randolph Hearst. He has returned to Nantucket on Hearst's yacht; also along is Amos's mistress, Gussie, who happens to be Joshua's daughter. Jeremiah, now an actor who specializes in playing the Frankenstein monster both on and off the stage, has come to the island to revenge himself on Joshua for his father's death and on Lydie for giving him the pox. Beaty exposes Amos as a syphilitic seducer, which loses him the patronage of Hearst (about whose blood test results Mr. Guare is silent). Gussie, who may not have syphilis, loses Amos, but gains an inventor, after he mistakes her for her pre-pubescent sister. Jeremiah, learning that Lydie is dead and forgiving Joshua, contracts with Beaty to drown their spirochetes through permanent submersion in the waters off Nantucket Beach.

FROM THE SWEAT on my palms, I'm convinced I've gone to more trouble providing this synopsis than Guare did in concocting it. So much depends on implausible coincidences and mistaken identities (usually adolescents being confused with adults) that one suspects the playwright of doodling. Whatever the case, the only issues that seem to awaken him from woolgathering are his *Ragtime*-like historical references and his impulse to characterize our national malaise. Guare appears to believe, along with more learned commentators, that something poisonous entered the bloodstream of American life following the Civil War; hence, his overworked metaphor of venereal disease. But syphilis is not just a dramatic metaphor, it is also an actual affliction, and, as Ibsen understood when he wrote *Ghosts*, it cannot be promiscuously used to ani-

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mate a plot. Otherwise, our national problems would all seem to have been solved by Dr. Alexander Fleming's experiments with bread mold.

After Louis Malle's sensitive collaboration with Guare on the film of *Atlantic City*, this production is a sad disappointment. Aside from John Wulp's impressionistic setting of a Nantucket beach house, adjacent to dunes and the skeleton of an old rowboat, there is little that is theatrical about the evening. Malle is working with sound actors, but they are adrift here, no doubt baffled by the bizarre convolutions of the plot and their characters. Roberta Maxwell, as a red-maned Beaty, elects to do one of O'Neill's loquacious Irish servant girls; Ben Cross plays Jeremiah as a *fin-de-siècle* looney-tune, gaping and staring into the middle distance; Josef Sommer, as Joshua, loping like Henry Fonda, seems too reticent to achieve any natural flamboyance; only Madeleine Potter provides a little spirit, playing the pot-smoking, profane Gussie preparing to inherit this parched earth ("It's almost 1900. I'm American. It's about to be my century").

I'm bewildered by the awkwardness of *Lydie Breeze*, and dejected by the incompetence a gifted dramatist reveals when attempting to write something with ambitions beyond the ordinary. If the theater is the barometer of a time, this play shows us how unsettled is our current climate, how difficult it is to predict or analyze. Still, I'm encouraged by Guare's effort to write about something larger than personal relationships; we can still hope that his next works in the cycle will benefit from his failure here. The most positive way to regard *Lydie Breeze* is as background for better plays, a sketch or rough draft during which the playwright is sharpening his pencils in preparation for something of more consequence.

Richard Schechner, late of the Performance Group, has recently declared the death of the avant-garde—something his Wooster Group successors interpret as merely Schechner's way of announcing his own withdrawal into tenured teaching. To judge by the Wooster Group's tour of its *Route 1 & 9*, which I saw at Northeastern University the other day, the avant-garde is still alive despite Schechner's retirement, though displaying the same infirmities as most contemporary theater. Directed and designed by Elizabeth LaCompte (in association with Jim Clayburgh), this is a group creation of a type familiar to us from previous collective enterprises of the 1960s and 1970s, the difference being its generous use of video materials and its erratic, scattershot approach.

The piece begins with a TV lecture on Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, describing its various "innovations" ("dead people talking") and "how the play . . . fits into the humanities in general." The spiritless lecturer who delivers this talk is meant to be as deadening as Ionesco's professor in *The Lesson*, while his academic banalities are intended as blistering commentary on a play which, though still beloved of regional theaters and high-school drama groups, never quite recovered from Kenneth Tynan's satiric perception that these same folksy townspeople were perfectly capable of repressing, if not of lynching, America's black population. Following a loud alarm bell, four representatives of this population—played by white actors in provocative minstrel-show regalia (blackface, fright wigs, clown lips, shuf-

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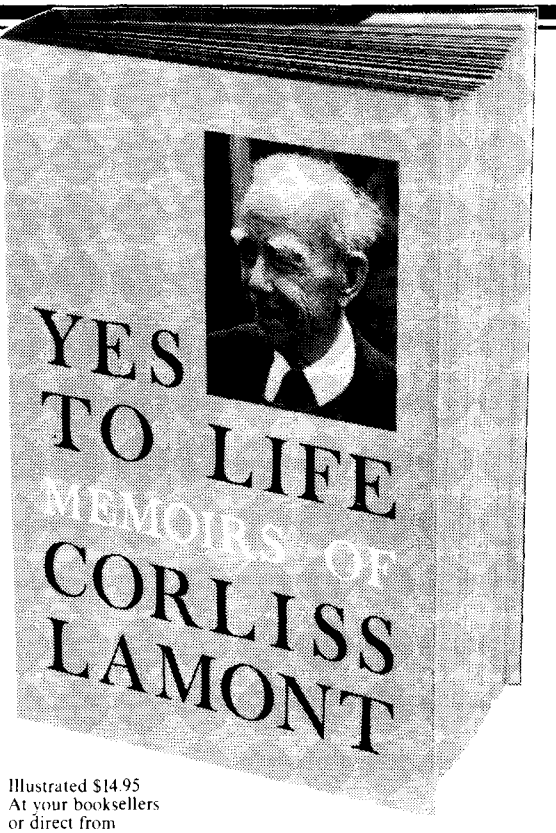

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fling gait)—go about the business of arranging the stage for the last act of the play, throwing beer cans, breaking glasses, dowsing the floor with whiskey, sending out for barbecued chicken and Carvel birthday cakes, dancing to earsplitting disco; meanwhile, tender close-up scenes from the play continue on the video screens. The Wooster Group, in short, would like to drive us crazy with our own technology, all the while suggesting (and I'll try not to sound like the lecturer here) that nostalgic myths like *Our Town* have lost all relevance, if they ever had any, to the contemporary experience.

In the last section of the work, entitled "Route 1 and 9," a video screen that has been sending out nothing but electronic blips throughout the evening suddenly erupts into remarkably explicit oral and genital sex, while two other screens take us on a color TV trip down the American highway landscape. George and Emily have left their bucolic never-never land and entered the world of hard porn. According to a clock on the ravaged stage, the evening ends precisely at 11 p.m., the hour when (we have been told) all good theater is supposed to conclude.

There's no way to evaluate something like this. It either reinforces your prejudices or it doesn't. My own response was initial assent coupled with a growing alarm I found hard to explain.

Reconsideration: Richard Wilbur.

America's Master Of Formal Verse

By Brad Leithauser

More than a third of a century has elapsed since publication of his broadly praised first book of poems, and now, at sixty-one, with five more volumes of poetry behind him, Richard Wilbur is almost unanimously acknowledged to be one of the few living American masters of formal verse. Such unanimity is unusual in a world as diffuse and factional as that of contemporary poetry, and it not only bespeaks a deserved admiration but perhaps also suggests that the role is not widely coveted. In a world in which free poetic forms loudly prevail and rhymed, metrical verse is commonly perceived as old-fashioned, Wilbur's eminence as a formalist can be conceded generously and without envy. It is a somewhat singular position, then, that Richard Wilbur occupies—a monarch in a realm which in the last few decades has grown increasingly depopulated.

A great many of Wilbur's near contemporaries who now work chiefly in free forms—among them, W. S. Merwin, Louis Simpson, Donald Hall—began as formalists and carried their formal training into their freer explorations. This is generally not the case with poets twenty or thirty years younger than Wilbur. Free verse and its various half-disciplined siblings have of course been around a great many years, but it's only now, for better or worse, that we are witnessing the ascendancy of the first generation in the history of English-language verse never to have worked seriously in form. Poets have always rightly resented the way critics can, because they have little first-hand experience with the demands of form, condescendingly dismiss as "mere artifice" or "tour de force" what was achieved only by dint of vast emotional as well as mental labor. This unhappy gap now undergoes a poignant widening when poets themselves may have difficulty grasping how much love and skill has gone into the formalist's craft.

Because his long fidelity to form makes him something of a rarity, Wilbur is also beset by critics who scan the contents for the package, or equate a "conservative" use of old forms with a conservative or narrow outlook. Yet for all his prominent mastery of form, he has, in the vernacular of a plain-speaking poetic age, "something to say" as well. Indeed, however one may ultimately evaluate his work, a careful reader must come away from it convinced that its creator is a man of large, lively, and mettlesome intellect.

IN THE LATE summer of 1981, when I visited Wilbur at his home, I found him in the happy state of having recently completed his fourth translation from seventeenth-century French drama. After four Molière comedies he has turned to tragedy, Racine's *Andromache*, rendering it, as he did the Molière, in rhymed couplets. Having the play completed left him feeling ready to begin his fall teaching duties at Smith College, not far from his home in Cummington, Massachusetts, and also to work with greater absorption on his next volume of poems which he hopes to have amassed in two or three years. Five years have passed since the appearance of his last book, *The Mind-Reader*; he tends to work slowly.

Critics of Wilbur who have faulted his verse for not showing enough of the ravages of our age might also, and now somewhat jealously, note that these have not touched him physically either. He is a very handsome and extraordinarily youthful-looking man, large (six foot two) and slim, his reddish-brown hair all but untouched by gray. He likes daily exercise, for which his house, with its swimming pool, ping-pong table, and tennis court, is well equipped. Located beside a dairy farm, this is a modern house in what remains a somewhat rural landscape. But the house, too, has its rural touches, including a large vegetable garden and a structure which, for a writer, is at once romantic and practical: a renovated silo, a kind of miniature and homely Yeatsian tower, where Wilbur can work in isolation.

Since his discharge from the Army after World War II, Wilbur has chosen a life of great stability. He has passed nearly all these years in academia, mostly at New England colleges. (Interestingly—in this dispersive age—his four grown children all now live in Massachusetts, too.) In this, as in many aspects of his poetry, he bears comparison with Robert Frost, who was an early friend. His wife Charlee's great-aunt was Susan Hayes Ward, the woman who first published Frost, in the *Independent*, and offered him encouragement during the long gestation before his first book materialized. Frost as an elderly man once confided to Charlee that she'd made a good choice in marrying Wilbur, but

Brad Leithauser's first book of poems, *Hundreds of Fireflies*, published this January, is the sixth book in the Knopf Poetry Series.

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that she should guard against his going mad. To readers who find in Wilbur the triumph of a dry rationality, this admonition may seem needless, but a close reading shows that for Wilbur as for Frost (who lived in such unsettling proximity to madness) the ordered form of a poem represents a "stay against confusion." Indeed, it may be tempting to see in Wilbur a desperation that probably is not there, for in fact Wilbur appears to have kept over the years not only his wits but most of his composure. Yet it is significant that the major tension in his work is the contrary, dissociative tug between the ideal and the actual, and the shuttling role the mind must play between the spirit's hunger for visions and the body's physical hungers.

It is a tension to be found in Wilbur's first book, *The Beautiful Changes* (1947), though not predominant there. Indeed, one characteristic of that book is that little—save perhaps an affection for rhymed verse—predominates; it is a wise and expansive young man's miscellany, in which one encounters war poems and nature poems, religious meditations and light verse. The language ranges from a plunging colloquial ("God knows I / Would be the last alive to cry / To Whatzisname, 'I love thy wheels!' ") to a formal rhetoric weighted by archaic inversions ("laundry white," "they dream and look not out"). The poems openly display a multiplicity of influences: E. E. Cummings in some of the diction ("Any greenness to deeper than anyone knows") and in the penchant for odd and often neologistic compound words ("herehastening," "fineshelled," "lightcaped," "muchtouched"); Marianne Moore in the many quirky leapings, linked only by "and," between the general and the concrete ("There's classic and there's quaint, / And then there is that devout intransitive eye / Of Pieter de Hooch"); Frost in some of the apothegmatic, seasonal reflections ("And doubtless it is dangerous to love / This somersault of seasons; / But I am weary of / The winter way of loving things for reasons"). Remarkable in *The Beautiful Changes* is the deft way such debts are acknowledged and paid; by means of a transmuting wit and affection, what might have been mere echoes become tributary extensions of beloved voices. Note, for example, how quietly the choice of "somersault" above, with its homonymous "summer" budded within it, enriches the line. Such delights are often so subtle in Wilbur's work that they could be taken for mere happenstance did they not arise so frequently and so neatly. Few of the poems in *The Beautiful Changes* are among Wilbur's best, I think, but the work is flush with such bountiful promise as to leave little doubt of his future accomplishment.

PHOTOGRAPH OF RICHARD WILBUR BY CLEMENS KALISCHER

It was a promise in large part met with the publication of *Ceremony* three years later. A cleaner and more robust line had emerged, with no loss of the technical complexity and intricate music Wilbur had already unveiled in *The Beautiful Changes.* This second book offered new fields of competence—dramatic dialogue, narrative, some fine translations from the French, and an epigrammatic concision whereby large observations are delivered in compact boxes. Take for example this couplet, one of two under the title "Epistemology": "We milk the cow of the world, and as we do, / We whisper in her ear, 'You are not true.' " In two lines Wilbur has evoked and wryly commented on that schism with which the philosopher must live—at once insisting that all surrounding objects may be illusions, and yet drawing from these illusory bodies his mundane but essential daily livelihood. (Wilbur may also be taking an offhand slap at men's impossible demands on women.) *Ceremony* also abounds in passages that exhibit a capacious gift for conveying action, as in the opening of "Part of a Letter": "Easy as cove water rustles its pebbles and shells / In the slosh, spread, seethe, and the backsliding / Wallop and tuck of the wave. . . ."

With his second book, Wilbur had manifested both so much promise and such achievement that even Randall Jarrell, a critic who found much to censure in Wilbur's early work, granted that "he seems the best of the quite young poets writing in this country." Other critics had fewer reservations; Wilbur was praised warmly by Louise Bogan, M. L. Rosenthal, and T. S. Eliot—heady applause for a man who had published both volumes before turning thirty.

In one of his later poems, "Seed Leaves," Wilbur examines the philosophical implications of a plant recently erupted from the soil's "crusty rubble."

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It has not yet taken on any distinguishing characteristics, any "sure and special signature," and hence serves as a kind of universal vegetation—an every-plant, so to speak. As such, it wields a mystery and potentiality it can never sustain once it has identified itself:

> This plant would like to grow
> And yet be embryo;
> Increase, and yet escape
> The doom of taking shape . . .

In the personification of the plant's dilemma we find a ready analogy to Wilbur's own poetic evolution. A variety of voices and tones sounded in his first two books, leaving his future development, like the plant's, unclear; with the appearance of his third, however, (*Things of This World*, 1956), a favored tone, a distinctive voiceprint, had emerged. This is hardly to suggest that Wilbur hasn't altered since the mid-1950s, for he has indeed changed and, in some ways, gotten even better. Nonetheless, the poems of *Things of This World* are far closer kin to his most recent work than to his two earlier books.

WHAT TRAITS, then, can we say are characteristic of Wilbur? Most immediately evident is a breadth of language which comprises many sorts of words regarded suspiciously by most of his contemporaries. He is fond of long words, often latinate, that might be considered "overly poetic" ("quotidian," "invincible," "adamantine," "discarnate"); he employs a number of terms whose range of meaning has all but vanished—another kind of corporate "takeover"—behind their commercial connotations ("franchise," "office," "promotion," "revenue"); he plucks from the litter of advertising slogans a number of wayworn enhancers ("lovely," "gorgeous," "beautiful," "superb"). These salvages are not always successful, but the effect of such "tainted" language when fed into a matrix dense with music and wordplay can be aerating: one feels that a language's musty corridors have been purified.

Characteristic, too, is what might be termed an elevated grandness of both subject and style. In powerful, fair-spoken lines Wilbur confronts absolutely enormous questions, both timeless (the mediation of body and soul, the past's claims on the present) and temporal (nuclear weapons, the Bicentennial, the Vietnam War). His approach is usually direct, or as direct as a complex subject matter will permit (as he said in one of his essays, "If you respect the reality of the world, you know that you can approach that reality only by indirect means"), and he does not flinch from words like "death," "love," "blessed," or "ecstasy." His comment in a radio broadcast regarding his poem "Love Calls Us to the Things of This World" is revealing:

> Is it possible . . . to speak intelligibly of angels in the modern world? Will the psyche of the modern reader consent to be called a soul? The poem I have just presented was a test of those questions.

Though Wilbur has often spoken of his inability to write poetry on order for specific occasions, he has managed to bring his elevated style to bear on a range of events, both personal and social. There are elegies for Auden and Dudley Fitts, a couple of Vietnam War protests, a wedding toast for his son, a birthday poem, a "speech for the repeal of the McCarran Act," a Christmas hymn. Just as Wilbur's language is broad, so is the scatter of events on which he has focused his talents; his verse, though elevated, is flexible enough to encompass an impressive sweep of life. (And it should be noted that in Wilbur all is not elevation; no one in America writes finer light verse.)

IMPLICIT IN much of this elevated verse is a repudiation of Auden's claim that "poetry makes nothing happen." A poem like "Advice to a Prophet" is not merely—though this would itself be ambitious—an attempt to portray something of the horrors of nuclear war; in contriving to set it in the form of advice to a doomsayer, Wilbur with unspoken optimism suggests that it is possible—through prophecy, through poetry—to transform the way people perceive the threat of world destruction. About this poem he has said, "It made it possible for me to feel something beside a kind of abstract horror, a puzzlement, at the thought of nuclear war; and it may so serve other people. I hope so." Wilbur advises the prophet to speak not of mankind's destruction, which we can hardly conceive, but of the destruction of the natural world, which through spoliation of the environment we know all too well. Nature, the poem says, has helped give us our humanity—and hence, indirectly, the poem speaks of mankind's destruction after all:

> Ask us, prophet, how we shall call
> Our natures forth when that live tongue is all
> Dispelled, that glass obscured or broken
>
> In which we have said the rose of our love and the clean
> Horse of our courage, in which beheld
> The singing locust of the soul unshelled,
> And all we mean or wish to mean.

Here warning blends, in a passage as affecting as any in Wilbur, into celebration.

FORMAL, elevated utterance is of course a hazardous enterprise that easily balloons into bombast, a danger Wilbur evades by a variety of techniques, perhaps most importantly through a punning lightness and a continual use of the colloquial. Lines dip frequently into bare and simple statement (e.g., "And all we mean or wish to mean"); as Wilbur has put it, "I don't like to stay aloft too long." It is uncharacteristic that a spare image like "A toad the power mower caught / Chewed and clipped of a leg" would co-habit in the same poem with "Toward misted and ebullient seas / And cooling shores, toward lost Amphibia's emperies," or that an "open mouth / Banjo-strung with spittle" would room with "An unseen genius of the middle distance, / Giddy with godhead or with nonexistence."

Wilbur's success with elevated verse also derives from something harder to define and isolate, and which might best be termed a sense of proportionality. Stanzas fit together; asides remain subordinate to the thoughts they spring from. This is a talent Wilbur has commanded from the outset, as Louise Bogan observed in her review of *The Beautiful Changes*:

> [H]e can contemplate his subjects without nervousness, explore them with care, and let them drop at the exact moment that the organization of a poem is complete. This ease of pace,

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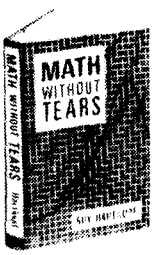

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this seemingly effortless advance to a resolute conclusion, is rare at his age; the young usually yield to tempting inflation and elaboration.

The result is that Wilbur conveys a sense of a mind whose supervisory inner eye has seen the poem as a whole. Or, to phrase this differently, one almost always senses that he is in control of his poem.

THIS CONTROL may put off those readers searching for a headlong spontaneity rarely present in Wilbur. To return to the image of the plant in "Seed Leaves," one must in fairness ask what losses he incurred in "the doom of taking shape." A reader who turns from later Wilbur to his first two books is apt to feel that a wilderness has been tempered, an exuberance curbed; his poetry has lost none of its energy (Anthony Hecht, a poet of prodigious energy himself, has written that Wilbur's is "the most kinetic poetry I know"), but the poet who once placed a full stanza in capital letters, coined neologisms with a counterfeiter's abandon, and wildly prised words out of their fixed parts of speech (creating, for example, the verb "Veniced"), has grown more circumspect. And with this circumspection has come, perhaps, some loss in the capacity to surprise.

Linked to this loss is Wilbur's tendency at times to be too articulate about what he confesses is ultimately ineffable. To analyze a mystery, even in a spirit of humility and praise, is sometimes necessarily to diminish it. Wilbur is fond of excursions to the edge of the knowable ("the pitchy whirl / At the mind's end" in "The Beacon"; "the furl / Of waters, blind in muck and shell" in "Conjuration"; "the buried strangeness / Which nourishes the known" in "A Hole in the Floor"). The reader may be left with a feeling that such attempts, though admirably bold, are finally disappointing—that in *terra incognita* obliquity and implication are the poet's only satisfactory map and compass.

On balance, such reservations must be muttered tentatively, while praise should be sung in full voice; for in a glum and occluded poetic age, Wilbur has kept his eyes open to acclaim beauty and the dignity of "the thing done right / From the clay porch / To the white altar" ("A Plain Song for Comadre"). And his work—though in recent years it comes with regrettable slowness—shows little sign of depletion; some of his more recent poems (his elegy for Auden, "The Fourth of July," and the title poem from *The Mind-Reader*) belong beside his best work.

Questions of depletion, of roads taken and not taken, arise naturally as a poet moves into his sixties. Gratified to have the Racine translation behind him at last, Wilbur now looks forward to working more concentratedly on his own poetry, but has set no new goals for himself other than a desire "to find out if there is anything I've been avoiding writing, and to write that." He is uncertain whether he wants soon to begin another translation. Though time-consuming, these translations offer him numerous appeals, among them a satisfaction in knowing he does them extremely well. Wilbur himself, whose good-natured boasts are modestly couched in excessive qualifications, says, "There is a pleasure in doing something better than anyone else. And I translate seventeenth-century French drama into rhymed English couplets better than anyone else."

Wilbur's wife wants him now to devote his time to his own poetry and to put off another translation until, in his words, "I'm in my sunset years." Most poets just reaching sixty-one would find their sunset years encroaching fast. Wilbur and his wife speak of them as if they are decades off. To look at him swimming laps in the chilly water of his pool—or to look into his most recent verse—one can thankfully believe that the two of them are right.

FAMILY AS DESTINY

The Kennedy Imprisonment by Garry Wills

(Atlantic/Little Brown, 310 pp., $14.95)

Twenty years ago it was my fate to arrive in Washington as a very young foreign correspondent just over a year after John Fitzgerald Kennedy was inaugurated President. It was a disorienting experience. "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, But to be young was very heaven. . . ." I had been told in tones of exalted excitement that the new Administration was drawn from the finest flower of the American liberal intelligentsia: that it was radical, tough-minded, yet sensitive to the underprivileged at home and abroad, and deeply committed to the search for disarmament and peace.

Because of the curious, and spurious, Anglophilia of the Kennedy circle—which was certainly inspired by no affection for the real country I had grown up in, but by a sort of envy of the imperial society my contemporaries and I were glad to see the back of—and because my editor, David Astor, was an Anglo-American millionaire, I was given far more time by the higher echelons of the Administration than could possibly have been justified. After all, didn't their public relations men constantly assure me that, though their minds were like steel traps, they all worked sixteen hours a day?

I found them altogether different from the selective image they had projected across the Atlantic. With admirable, but few, exceptions, they were embarrassingly deferential toward wealth and established social position (though not so embarrassing in this respect as most of the journalists who celebrated them so uncritically). They were obsessed with national glory and military power. Yet they were oddly amateurish and uncertain in their conduct of government. They were largely uncritical of economic inequality and almost totally insensitive to the rising clamor of black consciousness. "Where can they go to?" was the response I got from the closest of the President's "liberal" domestic advisers when I asked politely whether some blacks might not be alienated by the Administration's failure to redeem specific campaign pledges. He meant that, since blacks could not be expected to vote Republi-

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can, their discontents could safely be ignored.

My education progressed. I began to learn what the endlessly repeated adjective "tough-minded" meant. A tough-minded official was not one who rejected tempting policy equivocations or courageously resisted pressure from powerful interests. He was one who did not mind being called a bastard. These people, I came to understand after watching them at work and play—and utterly failed to persuade my dazzled editors in London—were not radicals, or liberals, or even Whigs. They were Tories. Their most substantial achievements, after all, were what? To cut taxes for corporations and for the well-to-do, and to increase military expenditure. They were also credited, rightly or wrongly, with having shown the correct blend of firmness and restraint in handling the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. Their defenders claim, in addition, that if the President had not been assassinated he would have carried out all those measures—civil rights, voting rights, Medicare, and so on—which the despised Lyndon Johnson actually did enact, and many of which the Reagan Administration is now trying to dismantle.

On its actual record, the Kennedy Administration looks more like a premonition of Ronald Reagan than an extension of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It pulled off a supreme public relations coup by passing itself off in the ghettos of American cities and in the barrios of the third world as the scourge of privilege and the harbinger of justice, when all the time. . . .

There I go! Even after twenty years, it is hard not to be carried away by recollected indignation at the sheer nerve with which we were all conned. And so I read Garry Wills's latest book with something more than the admiration with which I have followed his intellectual development

MAKING SENSE

A tatting of wings this morning
broke silence, and dream:
a spider tethered a wasp to a mullion.
I tried, failing,
to resist my own translation—
Just as the field growth arrays
itself in summer seed-fringe, it seems,
each thing in its way
begins to prepare
for winter, inside and out.
The kingdoms below us all season
have eaten and given
themselves to be eaten without
remark or record, have known fears
and lusts but not
as a man might know them:
as nooses
mounted the wings in a silken
skein, to spider and wasp
there occurred
perhaps some version
of *Here is an end*
of all this.
Don't call it neurosis.
Their vibrations
were routine,
professional, unlike those
of a man.

one who sees how the knuckles of one hand
have turned to white onions,
and picks at his food, and
looks out the windows
through the light
spare rain.
He is inside.
Try to project
him seated there as the panes
begin with the night
to close off pond, barn, cornpiece, the last few
nighthawks slicing the last few
ephemerids from air.
As the glass collects
the dark and dew
and reflects
his small sequestered dwelling's contents
back upon him, like conscience,
or simple consciousness,
try to picture him there.

Try to imagine him try
to make nothing
of all this, to make sense
of his day, his situation,
by making outward sense
an alternative to meditation:
sight, the great turtle
he confronted when, at dawn, he pried
the hatch of his well,
and deeper in, the gutted carp in the pool;
by noon, he could *smell*
wine in the wind off windfall apples
where late-laid larvae will die;
touch, in late afternoon,
when the lame hand brushed a spit bug's drool;
the bug's unlikely whistle
will do for *sound*,
heard before supper; for *taste*,
his recall
now of an odd flavor like charcoal
in the scarred skin over his late wife's
late left breast.
for all of which the word is *trouble*,
trouble, trouble! Not a growth from
the ground, but the ground itself
of self, which will not leave
all this alone.

I want the old man's grief
to be the winter-silent pain
of the body alone.
I want the old man older than I
to lend authority.
I want him to have learned by the end
of all this to make sense
no more than sense.
But see the hand
tense, like something that wants to take flight.
The spider has long since
retreated into sleep,
the wasp hanging
drugged in his casing.
Without comment.
Forever quiet.
But listen.
The old man will speak.
He is inside.
He will go on speaking,
I fear, into the night.

SYDNEY LEA

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and the pleasure that is always to be gotten from his stylish writing. Would he see through all that old self-serving patter? Would he really stick it to them?

He has done that, and no mistake.

With the disdainful surprise of a man picking up something nasty with a pair of tongs, he dissects the mythology of the New Frontier and the flatteries of its courtiers. Quoting Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s praise for Mailer's *Esquire* article on Kennedy as "Superman at the supermarket," Wills comments:

> The cultural revolution Mailer anticipated was, in fact, accomplished, according to President Kennedy's biographers. Yet what was this declaration of the new freedom but an abject profession of servility to the one man—whatever man—sitting in the White House? The apparent compliment to the life of the mind was in fact a profound insult.

"There was," he says, "a deep sense of social and cultural inferiority under the tough outer whir of analysis and blur of activity." That there was. "The Kennedy rhetoric sounds flashy now." It does indeed: try rereading the inaugural address.

Sometimes Wills is brutal:

> Kennedy did not liberate the intellectuals who praised him; he subverted them. He played to all that was weakest and worst in them. . . . Men rose up from the ruins of their family to redeem their country, or preached the comity of nations because they could not abide the members of their own university department.

Sometimes he flicks the lash of a delicate irony. Of McGeorge Bundy, he indelibly records that "Kennedy told friends that, next to David Ormsby-Gore, Bundy was the brightest man he had ever known." It is a compliment Bundy must still cherish. Wills has done the Kennedys, their hangers-on, their pretensions, and all their works to a crisp. The job has been so well done that it surely does not need to be done again. This is not only the ultimate Kennedy book. It ought to be the last.

IT WAS COMMISSIONED, it would seem, as a campaign book about Edward Kennedy. It opens with a melancholy vignette of the youngest brother campaigning limply in New Hampshire in February 1980. Even then Wills seems to have had few illusions about what was in store for the Senator; or, if he had them, they have been edited away. Kennedy, he says in a memorable simile, "was like the last climber in a human chain going up a mountainside, tied to the prowess of the four men above him"—presumably his father and his three elder brothers.

> But then, in rapid succession, all four men fell, and the very strength that had been drawing him upward now hung a dead weight below him. Each time he stirred to go higher, he just slipped back. The Kennedy legacy had become a very literal burden; made his life a constant labor with death.

The book ends with an even more striking passage, inspired perhaps by Harris Wofford's book, *Of Kennedys and Kings*, contrasting the legacy of the Kennedys with that of Martin Luther King. Power, Wills meditates, is something that twists in the hand. It is about getting others to do one's will. It is about persuasion. That means it must surrender in order to win. "If sheer assertion of power results in its abdication, the reverse of that is also true: real power is gained by yielding one's own will in the persuasion of others." It is in the context of this paradox of power that Wills contrasts the Kennedys with King and finds them wanting. "King's death," he suggests,

> as tragic as Kennedy's, did not leave so large an absence. His work has outlasted him; more than any single person he changed the way Americans lived with each other in the sixties. His power was real, because it was not mere assertion—it was a persuasive yielding of private will through nonviolent advocacy.

That, says Wills, is why the antitheses and alliterations of John Kennedy's rhetoric sound so tinny now, while King's eloquence endures.

Between that striking beginning, and that end, the book is organized in five sections. Each shows Edward Kennedy as the prisoner of a tradition established by his father and his brothers: prisoner of an attitude to sex, a pressure of family, a manipulation of image, a cult of charisma, a preoccupation with power. Yet Wills is merciful toward the youngest Kennedy. His "character flaws," says Wills, "are neither as deep nor as crippling as those deployed by the older Kennedys." We have come some way here from the molasses served up by Theodore H. White or James MacGregor

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(Author's drawing after Edvard Munch's oil painting in 1906 of the Jena theoretical physicist Felix Auerbach.)

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Burns, to be sure. But there is real understanding of Kennedy's human predicament, and how much better Wills writes than the Kennedy courtiers did, with the faint echo of a Catholic education audible in the biblical rhythm of his sentences:

> The proper sequences have been irrevocably mixed. He is allowed neither youth nor age, neither death nor fully living. . . . Edward has no one but ghosts at his side, and they count more against than for him, eclipse him with bright images from the past. Where they were praised too fulsomely, he is bound to be judged too harshly. He inherits the illusions of his brothers' followers with the accumulated venom of their foes; and both tend to disinherit him.

Each of the five sections, while tracing contributory causes of the eclipse of Edward Kennedy, is a meditation on an aspect of the family's tradition as a whole. The first, drawing heavily on the remarkable research in the 1976 book by Joan and Clay Blair Jr., shows how the compulsive "skirt-chasing" of the father (who regularly propositioned his teenage sons' dates) became in John Kennedy both a sickly child's assertion of masculinity and the anodyne of a man who, according to his brother Robert, "passed half of his days on earth in terrible pain." It is hard to remember, Wills comments, that the "sexual revolution" of the 1950s began with a cult of Hemingway and a glorification of machismo that lead eventually to profound criticism of it.

The Riddle of THE SMITH: #3

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The second section, on the family, rightly points out how little the Kennedys were Irish—"Joseph Kennedy was so little Irish," says Wills tartly, "that he wanted to ape the English"—and how much they were, or fancied themselves to be, "English"—in the private family sense that a certain aristocratic arrogance toward women, servants, and those not accepted as equals was apparently thought of by the Kennedys as "English."

Drawing this time on Robert Sherrill's account in *The Last Kennedy*, Wills shows how all the concentric circles of the family as Family swung into operation after Chappaquiddick. Without a second thought, Edward Kennedy called on as fine a lawyer as Burke Marshall to put his reputation at risk. What is more astonishing is that so serious a man as Marshall agreed to help; we do not know about his second or afterthoughts.

JOSEPH P. KENNEDY knew how to use expert public relations men, but his most imaginative achievements were all his own work, and his masterpiece was the political career of his second son. That career, Wills mercilessly proves, was based on the projection of an image, and that image was based on lying. The truth of a courageous but unexceptional career in the Navy was thus machined into the legend of PT 109. The mediocre Harvard undergraduate thesis of 1940 and the Senate staff compilation of 1957 were hyped into *Why England Slept*, bestseller, and *Profiles in Courage*, Pulitzer Prize-winner.

When a young black woman reporter on the *Washington Post* won a Pulitzer Prize for an invented story, she was disgraced, and it was also held against her that she had untruthfully claimed to have been at Vassar. John Kennedy falsely claimed in his *Who's Who* entry to have spent a year at the London School of Economics studying under Harold Laski. In fact, he never studied there. (An interesting contrast with Mick Jagger, who attended the London School of Economics, but finds it an advantage in his line of work to pretend that he didn't.) "So a woman tried to advance her career," comments Wills,

> and is ruined. A student tries to pass Spanish, has a friend take his exam for him, and is kicked out of Harvard. But a Senator claims that he wrote what he did not, and goes blithely on to the presidency.

The word "charisma" was used by the politicians and publicists of the Kennedy era as a synonym for "glamour," or even for "sex appeal." The word has an intellectual history and specific meaning of its own, however. It was borrowed by Max Weber from the early Christian fathers to designate a particular type of political authority, one that Weber distinguished from "bureaucratic" or rational, and "legitimate" or traditional authority. The Kennedys and their supporters liked to contrast their own "existential" or "charismatic" style of politics with the "bureaucratic" ways of others, and especially of General Eisenhower. The contrast, needless to say, was favorable to themselves. Charismatic, good; bureaucratic, bad.

The most characteristic of all Kennedy operations, perhaps, was not the Cuban missile crisis, but the Bay of Pigs. Wills shows how it is not true that Kennedy "inherited" the plan from the Eisenhower Administration; he accepted and expanded it. The "onlie begetter" of the whole disaster was Richard Bissell, the admired teacher and model of McGeorge Bundy at Yale and the *beau idéal* of the upper-class intelligence addicts. Well, which proved to be a more effective style for organizing an amphibious landing: the shimmering existential brilliance of Bissell and the Kennedys at the Bay of Pigs, or the plodding bureaucracy of Eisenhower at Normandy?

THE FINAL ARGUMENT of this "meditation on power" concerns what has been claimed as the Kennedys' historic achievement: the Cuban missile crisis. In perhaps the most controversial passage of an uncompromisingly polemical book, Wills challenges the conventional wisdom that Kennedy's management of the crisis was a triumph of restraint. His conduct—confronting the Soviet Union with an ultimatum rather than working out a secret settlement of the crisis—was not truly restrained, says Wills. Nor was it truly a triumph. Because he had hidden from the American people the scope and the ruthlessness of his own attempts to remove Castro, by assassination if necessary, Wills maintains, Kennedy was driven to represent the installation of Soviet missiles in Cuba as motivated solely by aggression, when he knew that it was essentially defensive. ("Deterrence," Wills astutely comments, "is defence for us, and aggression for our enemies." He

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might have added that those enemies hold the same creed on this matter.)

The lesson that has been drawn from Kennedy's handling of the missile crisis is not that of restraint. It is that one should never negotiate without having first demonstrated one's strength. This lesson was applied with disastrous consequences in Vietnam. I fear that it will be applied again by the Reagan Administration. The only way to be a peacemaker is first to disarm the warmakers at home. To do that you must first win a little war. Is that not what Ronald Reagan and Alexander Haig are trying to do in El Salvador, though they know they must negotiate with the Soviet Union on nuclear weapons?

Wills embarks upon an inquiry into the nature of American attitudes toward power. He goes back to what I believe was the decisive experience: the abrupt transition between the apparent omnipotence of 1945 and the near-panic of 1947. But, long before he has developed this theme with the insight and subtlety of which he has shown himself capable, he drops it. The structure of his book, that elegant and ingenious structure, requires him to come back to the last paradox of power as it imprisoned Edward Kennedy in 1980: the paradox that power is most a prison when you think you are free to do what you like, and when you think of it as a prison, then you are already half-free.

This modulation is too sudden. It leaves great themes half-scratched. There is a disparity, almost a bathos, between the great issue of how Americans think of power, and of their proper place in the world, and the electoral prospects of Senator Edward M. Kennedy. By this stage, we are no longer fascinated by the Senator.

Garry Wills is quite right. The end of the "Kennedy time" has arrived. It is right that we should seek to understand the true meaning of that period, so that we can free ourselves of its myths and slogans. But now it is time to be moving on. There are very few people who understand better than Wills the complex interplay between the national mood and the fortunes of the political battle. It is surely time for him to turn to new themes—such as what that battle ought to be about—and to a world without Kennedys.

GODFREY HODGSON

Godfrey Hodgson is the author of *All Things to All Men: The False Promise of the Modern American Presidency* (Simon and Schuster).

UNCONFESSED HISTORY

Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful by Alan Paton

(Scribner's, 271 pp., $12.95)

Alan Paton's last novel, *Too Late The Phalarope*, was published almost thirty years ago. The events central to his new one are an oblique explanation for the gap: the political activism of the man prevented the writer from exercising what Harry Levin calls "that special concentration of the ego" which enables a writer to "discover the power within himself." In honorable retirement from politics, Paton has freed the power within himself; and it is inevitable that it should find its expression in what Czeslaw Milosz has called "unconfessed history": the personal dimension of events that can be perceived only through their recreation in imaginative works.

The new novel, intended to be the first of a trilogy, begins roughly in the period of South African history in which the previous novel was set. *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful* strides vigorously through the years from the first Nationalist Afrikaner government to its ideological apogee, the accession in 1958 of Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd, who, assuming the godhead of the chosen white *Volk*, promised a creation of "separate freedoms" for black and white that would be achieved, not in six days, but by 1976. Some of the

"A poem is spark and act, or else we need not read it a second time. Criticism is spark and act, or else we need not read it at all."
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issues occurring within the book's span (six years during the 1950s) were: the Bantu Education Act, the Suppression of Communism Act, the consolidation of the black "homelands" (yes, 13 percent of the land, and the loss of South African citizenship for the black majority), and the removal of "Coloured" voters of the Cape from the common roll. The 1950s also witnessed the formation of the Liberal Party (the only legal nonracial party, once the Communist Party was banned); the establishment of the secret society *Broederbond's* control of government; the alliance of black, Indian, and colored mass movements and white leftist movements in the Congress of the People, at which the Freedom Charter (similar to the United Nations Charter, and now banned) was adopted; the beginning of the boycott movement against racialism in South African sport, and of the opposition of church to state on the question of "mixed" worship. It was the era of the great mass movements of black (sprinkled with white) passive resistance to unjust laws. It saw the beginning of white right-wing urban terrorism, many years before the suppressed and outlawed black liberation movements turned in tragic desperation to the sporadic urban terrorism that frightens South Africans today.

IN PATON'S NOVELS one hears voices. That is his method. It derives perhaps—fascinatingly—from the secret level at which the suprarational of creative imagination and the suprarational of religious belief well up together in him. In *Phalarope* a voice bore witness to the undoing of a young man by racist laws that made a criminal act out of a passing sexual infidelity. A loving relative watched what she was powerless to prevent; hers was the voice of compassion. In *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful*, watcher has turned spy. Characters' actions are seen now by hostile, distorting eyes and recorded in the evil cadences of poison pen letters. Paton's technique remains the same, but his viewpoint has changed from sorrowful compassion to irony. Compare the hushed shock with which Paton described Pieter van Vlaanderen's "fall" (he has made love to a black girl) from the love of wife and family, honor, and self-respect in *Phalarope*, with the prurient cackle of Proud White Christian Woman when she writes anonymously to Robert Mansfield, a leader of the Liberal Party: "How are your black dolly girls? . . . [H]ow does your wife like to be poked by the same stick that has been poking the black dolly girls?"

The phalarope, rare bird of understanding that came too late between father and son in the earlier novel, is recognized between the generations in the proud acceptance by the wealthy Indian family, the Bodasinghs, of their daughter's involvement in the Defiance Campaign against unjust laws. And, much later in the narrative, the bird figures again in the rise of internal moral conflicts and their liberal resolution within formerly self-righteous racists like Van Onselen, a civil servant and one of the "voices," and his Aunt Trina, to whom his running commentary on central events and protagonists in the book is addressed. This type of happy-end conversion is sometimes difficult to believe and slightly embarrassing to read. Perhaps it is best taken as another symbol: that of Alan Paton the man's continued faith in the power of seeing the light, which is in tension with the writer's ironic doubt that its beam goes all the way to a change in power structure. Proud White Christian Woman's "conversion," on the other hand, is brought about by brutal circumstance that, alas, seems closer to the actualities of change in South Africa: the threat of her own death. She is dying of cancer, as there are signs that white society is beginning to know it can die of apartheid.

YET, WITH FEW exceptions, the writer wins out over the man. The most dangerous episode in the book, from the point of view of those who see Paton's assertions of faith as lapses into sentiment, is steely and silencing. An Afrikaner judge, in line for the highest legal honor in the land, disqualifies himself by ceremonially washing and kissing, in a black church, the feet of his old servant, to restore a breach of faith between the whites who administer a black ghetto and the blacks who live in it. The strangeness and awkward solemnity is somehow enhanced by devices of irony that also expose the incident's South African craziness. Comments within the book take the form of snippets of supposed newspaper reports wryly and slyly aping the attitudes and vocabularies of left and right. Criticism from the left is pre-empted:

> The episode is totally meaningless and irrelevant, and it shows once more how unrelated to our realities are the bourgeois values of goodwill and sporadic benevolence in our South African situation . . . an example of white condescension at its very worst. . . . The wages that she earns probably amount to three or four percent of the judge's salary. Such gross inequalities are not removed by any amount of washing or kissing.

Every word is true, and Paton knows it; but for him that truth lies alongside the other, his faith.

He probably will be accused, now, of Manichaeanism. The trouble with being a public, political figure as he has been is that the writer will always be judged in relation to that figure. But Paton ought, with this work, to be granted the writer's freedom and, indeed, obligation to show the Manichaean elements in the society that is his material. Since he is a fervently personal writer, his own convictions may dominate, but he fulfills a writer's vision by seeing everything that is *there*. He does not let himself shirk much. He is aware that if the 1950s were the high years of white liberalism, they saw more importantly the beginning of the revolutionary period for blacks. Chief Luthuli, talking to the fictional Robert Mansfield, Liberal Party leader, about the African National Congress alliance with the Communist Party, says: "When my house is burning down and we are all running to the fire, I don't say to the man next to me, Tell me first, where did you get your bucket, where did you draw your water?" From the mouth of another of the real personages who converse with fictional ones, Dr. Monty Naicker, comes: "This is going to be our life from now on. Some of us have to be destroyed now so that freedom can come to others later."

BEFORE I KNEW I was going to review this book, I read it and wrote to Alan Paton in response. What I said remains valid for me upon rereading the book as critic rather than fellow writer, and I am going to take the liberty of paraphrasing myself below.

One cannot read this book without the total absorption that comes from recognition of its truth and admiration for the artistic truth into which that has been transposed. There are many characters, yet this is not so much a novel as a meditation on subjects and characters in a novel. Paton has made a meditation his own novelistic form. He seems more interested—and he succeeds in making

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the reader more interested—in his reflections on the characters and events than in these people and events themselves. When his characters speak—even the "voices," the marvelous ventriloquist's acts of Proud White Christian Woman and Van Onselen—it is quite simply Alan Paton speaking. This was, I think, a fault in some of his earlier work. He did not always succeed in creating what Patrick White has called the "cast of contradictory characters of which the writer is composed." But this time, yes, Alan Paton is speaking, and such is his skill, so individual the music of his lyricism, the snap of his staccato, the beauty of his syntax, that what ought to be a failure becomes somehow the strength of the work. Style is a matter of finding the one way to say exactly what you have to say. What Paton wants to say here is so central to his own experience, at conscious and subconscious levels, that it is natural to hear it in his own voice.

Why a novel, then, and not just another volume of his autobiography (one was published recently)? Ah, but this is not *his* story; it is part of ours, the South Africans'. That demands an imaginative transposition. This one is achieved with shining intelligence and acerbity, a young man's book with the advantage of an old man's experience of the battle with life and words.

NADINE GORDIMER

Nadine Gordimer's most recent novel is *July's People* (Viking).

THE POLITICS OF ADOLESCENCE

Towards a New Cold War
Essays on the Current Crisis and How We Got There
by Noam Chomsky

(Pantheon, 498 pp., $20.50)

There are, roughly speaking, two ways to review Mr. Chomsky's book. One is to look for a particularly absurd statement or factual mistake (not necessarily of great relevance) early on in the book—for instance, the bomb explosion at the Munich Octoberfest in 1980, to which the author refers more than once. According to him, this was the second largest terrorist incident in Europe, killing fifty-three people. However, the number killed was in fact thirteen (even on the rare occasions when Mr. Chomsky is dealing with facts and not with fantasies, he exaggerates by a factor of, plus or minus, four or five). A few more minutes could then be spent in search of some glaring distortions—say on the origins of the cold war, or the militarism of the Kennedy Administration, or again on any number of factual points. Such an undertaking is not very arduous, for Chomsky transforms a well known Israeli writer into a general (Aluf Hareven), confuses a real general with a noted Russian novelist (Laskov), and mixes up a third general with Mussolini (Peled). A review of this kind would go on to point out that not much can be expected from a writer incapable of even spelling correctly the name of a well-known Harvard professor (Stanley Hoffmann), a writer for whom Jack Anderson and Israel Shahak are reliable witnesses for affairs of state, a writer who has tried to whitewash the mass murders in Cambodia, and collaborated with notorious French anti-Semites and neo-fascists in the denial of the Holocaust. Such a review would end with some suitable reflections about the kind of society in which such a squalid tract, such a clumsy piece of propaganda, such a ludicrous fabrication, intellectually worthless and morally grotesque, a parody of scholarship that reminds me of the worst excesses of Hitlerism and Stalinism, can be put out by a distinguished publishing house.

Le style c'est l'homme même, a distinguished Frenchman once said, but I am not sure whether he was altogether right. Even if he was, there are of course other ways to review books. But the problem of style apart, there still remains the question of whether one should take Mr. Chomsky seriously. Einstein played the violin, Freud played cards, Marx used to take walks in Hampstead Heath, but we do not look to them for guidance on these activities. Should Mr. Chomsky command respect as a writer on politics because he has made a name for himself in linguistics? I think he should; he has had a wide audience, even though the number of his admirers has shrunk as world events have lately failed to bear out his predictions. But he still manages to provoke and anger quite a few people.

My own feelings have been different. While I cannot honestly describe myself as an admirer of Mr. Chomsky's writings, I have found them of interest. And I believe that he has fulfilled a useful function for a variety of reasons, some positive, others negative, and yet others neutral. In an age of academic insipidity and pussyfooting, shrillness has a certain entertainment value. Chomsky presents a fascinating psychological case and an invaluable educational example. He genuinely believes that he has never been wrong. And since there is a bit of a Chomsky in most of us, we ought to be grateful, from time to time, to be reminded that there, but for the grace of God. . . .

IN DEFENSE of Chomsky, it must be said that his bark is sometimes worse than his bite. His new book starts with a long and acrimonious attack on Mrs. Claire Sterling and her book, *The Terror Network*; "absurd" is one of the least offensive epithets he applies to the work. In the end the reader is bound to reach the conclusion that Mrs. Sterling has invented all her stories, that there are no international links between terrorist groups and are no big powers supporting them. But whoever bothers to read Mr. Chomsky's fine print will find to his surprise that "it would be remarkable indeed if the Soviet Union were not engaged in international terrorism." Far from rejecting Mrs. Sterling's main argument, Chomsky actually accepts it. It should be noted in passing that although Mrs. Sterling was not able to substantiate some of her allegations in her book, a fact that was pointed out at the time by various reviewers (including the present writer), more evidence for linking the Red Brigades and other terrorists with Eastern Europe via Qaddafi and the PLO has since come to light, and not from American sources. Yet, to the best of my knowledge, no apologies have been extended to Mrs. Sterling by her critics.

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If Mr. Chomsky is not always right, he is not always wrong. He may mix up the Israeli generals and his comments are curiously restrained when he deals with the Arab Begins. But this does not invalidate his criticisms of the disturbing developments in Israel. Coming from him, spiced with exaggerations, derived partly from doubtful sources, and altogether one-sided, these criticisms will have no impact whatever on those they should reach. They will be read with sympathetic interest in the offices of the oil companies and the international banks, in the Secretariat of the United Nations and the foreign ministries of many countries which, quite independently of Mr. Chomsky and for different reasons, have reached the conclusion that Israel is a nuisance and should be abolished. Once upon a time it was perhaps a little unpopular to criticize Israel's domestic and foreign policies in the American media. Now there is a global consensus against Israel, extending from the far right to the extreme left, and including the CIA and the Pentagon. Chomsky, the erstwhile outsider, has become a mainstream spokesman; if he feels a little uncomfortable in this company, he certainly does not show it.

BUT THESE ARE relatively minor issues. What makes the Chomsky phenomenon so interesting is rooted in a deeper level: time for him stood still in 1947 or thereabouts. True, the action may have moved to different countries since the early postwar years; but the basic issues have remained the same and so have his instincts, those of an eighteen-year-old product of the radical Zionist-socialist youth movement who has read Marx and, being a little precocious, has already proceeded to Rosa Luxemburg and Anton Pannekoek, whose visions of unconditional internationalism he fully shares. He is possessed by a surfeit of idealism, a burning wish to change the world, to search for total freedom and absolute social justice; an abhorrence of war and chauvinism; a contempt for those willing to compromise with the world as it is and who end up as traitors to the cause. From the perspective of an eighteen-year-old, the history of mankind is just beginning and everything is possible—provided only that there is the unconditional will to fight for the great revolution which will solve all problems, which will make Palestine a binational state and transform the Arab countries, Iran, and the third world in general, into genuine democratic societies, free from nationalist and racist prejudices and imbued with the spirit of humanism, tolerance, and nonviolence. This is the revolution that will destroy American imperialism, while the Soviet bureaucratic distortion of real socialism will wither away, no longer menaced by external enemies, or simply be swept away by the people. From afar a mighty chorus is already heard, *"C'est la lutte finale, groupons-nous, et demain / l'Internationale sera le genre humain."*

THIS, THEN, is the vision, and I restate it here not in a spirit of ridicule. For it is in many ways a very attractive vision in its idealism, its refusal to be discouraged by the bitter experience of the past, when revolutions failed and brought worse tyranny. Without idealism and optimism there is not much hope for mankind, and Martin Buber was of course right when he wrote about adolescence as the eternal chance *(Glückschance)* of mankind. (I, however, am no longer certain that Buber had politics in mind when he wrote those lines, except perhaps in the vaguest way.)

But how is the vision to be realized? College freshmen reading the classics of political science will learn that politics as a vocation means compromise with realities; means giving a finger (and, on occasion, the whole hand) to the devil; means that there is no freedom, equality, and democracy even in revolutionary movements; means that the ethics of politics are not those of the prophet Isaiah and the Sermon on the Mount; means that post-revolutionary regimes are not markedly less oppressive and intolerant than their predecessors. The young Chomskys, needless to say, will reject such defeatist talk. But in the long run they cannot fail to notice that most of their contemporaries do not share their values and visions, be they of libertarian socialism or a binational state in Palestine; and that this rejection is not just limited to a few monopoly capitalists, their servants, and the fools brainwashed by the media into a false consciousness. Perhaps they need a little coercion for their own good?

The case of the binational state is a perfect illustration of Chomskyan politics. There is no denying that in a sensible world this would have been the ideal solution for both Jews and Arabs. Unfortunately, binationalism has not worked in India any better than in Cyprus or Lebanon. It does not function well even in such highly civilized countries as Canada or Belgium. It never had a chance in Palestine. Quoting a friendly witness, Mr. Chomsky puts the blame on the "Europe-oriented Israeli leadership afraid of the Levantinization of their society." But in fact almost all advocates of Arab-Jewish rapprochement came from these European-oriented circles, whereas Jews of Middle Eastern background (from whom Mr. Begin derives the majority of his votes) were always far more suspicious and hostile toward the Arabs. As for the Arabs, they regarded binationalism as a joke and not a very good one at that.

MR. CHOMSKY presents essays "on the current crisis and how we got there." Let us assume for argument's sake that his descriptions and analyses are correct. Let us then imagine him a senior decisionmaker in Washington or Jerusalem and ask how would he lead us out of the crisis. The concerned reader will look in vain for answers—except perhaps such obvious advice as to engage in unilateral disarmament, to dismantle the industrial-military complex, to refrain from interventionism, to share our wealth with the third world, and to read Marx, Bakunin, and Pannekoek. Mr. Chomsky must know that if all these demands were fulfilled, even if America disappeared from the map altogether, the world would still not be a more peaceful place, nor would there be less oppression and injustice. He would probably argue that it is not the task of the intellectual to provide alternative strategies but to be critical, to negate. The only strategies he develops are for the use of sectarian groups, and they have the immense advantage that they need not bear any relation to realities: any statement, any promise can be made and any problem can be solved on the level of abstraction. For there is not the slightest danger that the ideological platform will ever be put to a test, that it will have any effect on the course of events, except perhaps in a negative way.

Thus we are back to the politics of adolescence and the youth movement, of ideological purity, of unlimited idealism and of irresponsibility as a way of life. The idealism has meanwhile turned into almost pathological aggression; Saint-Just is now in his fifties. The

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growing divorce from reality makes it impossible to refute Mr. Chomsky, but it also makes rational discourse well-nigh impossible. Mr. Marcus Raskin in a blurb on the cover of the book says that Mr. Chomsky's essays are a strong blend of reason and passion. He forgot to add that the ratio of passion to reason is about ten to one, and that it is the kind of passion about which the poet wrote that *"it left the ground to lose itself in the sky."*

WALTER LAQUEUR

Walter Laqueur is chairman of the International Research Council of the Center for Strategic and International Studies at Georgetown University.

BRIEF REVIEW

The Cosmic Code: Quantum Physics as the Language of Nature by Heinz R. Pagels

(Simon and Schuster, 370 pp., $17.50)

In *The Two Cultures* C. P. Snow complains that many of the same people who lament the illiteracy of scientists cannot describe the second law of thermodynamics, which he considers the "scientific equivalent" of a work of Shakespeare's. Most well-educated people are least educated about science. When a scientist endeavors to share with general readers some aspect of contemporary scientific research, he must, therefore, be clear, patient, and almost utterly nontechnical. When it comes to physics, the mathematics involved make this an especially tall order. But learn about physics we should; though common knowledge about it seems to end with the theory of relativity, the twentieth century has had another such revolutionary development, quantum physics, the implications of which are manifold and fascinating. Quantum physics ended the classical view of the universe as certain and ordained; it meant, in Einstein's disconcerting words, that God plays dice. Heinz Pagels, an associate professor of theoretical physics at Rockefeller University, believes that there are several reasons why quantum physics didn't catch the public imagination: the early 1930s, when the first discoveries were made, was a time of economic depression, intellectuals were preoccupied with political ideology, and, most important, the abstract, advanced mathematics required by quantum theory were difficult and bore little relation to immediate, tangible human experience. *This book is his attempt to make quantum physics catch the public imagination.*

A lot of effort goes into that attempt. Trenchant quips such as the above one by C. P. Snow appear as epigraphs to each chapter. There's a trove of wonderful anecdotes and quotes from the personal documents of Einstein, Niels Böhr, Max Planck, Paul Dirac, and many others. The first and longest part of the book recounts the developments in physics since Einstein's day; with its emphasis on personalities and its stories of old theories faltering and new discoveries being made, this section is cogent and compelling. Pagels tirelessly elucidates the theories, experiments, and equations his narrative touches upon; an entire chapter is devoted to randomness, lest we fail to understand that fundamental concept. Occasionally there are vivid personal insights:

> Identical things are confusing, even terrifying, reducing the sense of our own uniqueness. I find something dreadful in the black-and-white photographs that Diane Arbus has taken of twin children, usually dressed identically. . . . Confronted with identical objects, many people feel uncomfortable. . . . All macroscopic objects have discernable differences, and somehow this perception is comforting. But if we enter the microworld of molecules and atoms we also enter the world of absolute identity. There is no use in looking for differences. . . . It was nature, not nineteenth-century manufacturers, that first utilized the principle of interchangeable parts.

Despite all of Pagels's efforts, though, *The Cosmic Code* won't engage someone whose curiosity about quantum physics isn't substantial. The information is often intractably technical, even though Pagels uses very little mathematics. After a while some of the anecdotal material, while entertaining, feels a bit

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cosmetic. The first, long part of the book is chronological and swift, but the second and third parts, which contain lots of important introductory information about quantum physics (names of parts of matter, relevant theories and issues), are neither chronological nor swift. Throughout, Pagels offers numerous examples and elucidations, but the complexity of his material often makes helpful or vivid ones impossible.

But this is relatively minor griping about difficulties that are mostly inherent in the task Pagels has set for himself. We should be grateful for the fairly painless path he clears to the conceptual center of contemporary physics. Don't come to this book expecting the poetic evocations of Lewis Thomas, the moral or personal vision of Freeman Dyson, or the catering to nonscience-oriented readers of Carl Sagan, and don't come without an honest desire to learn about quantum physics. Pagels is an intelligent and sincere teacher, and he has succeeded in writing a quantum physics primer for the curious nonphysicist that is important, interesting, helpful, and as engaging as the subject matter allows.

MARC GRANETZ

CORRESPONDENCE, *from page 2*

proclaimed their war objections. How one-sided. How typical. How privilege does dare mock its surroundings.

Nearly an entire generation of men is burdened by the guilt of willful failure to serve because of self-concern, self-conceit, and self-preservation. Bruce Caputo, political profiteer, has acquired the first clear loss his activities earned. The rest of his "class" will, as he will, continue to receive what they earned. Their war will be fought forever in their minds, while those who honored their obligations to their country have to "worry war no more."

Richard Shemtob
New York, New York

The editors welcome correspondence from TNR's readers. Letters intended for publication should include the correspondent's full name, address, and telephone number; should be typed double-spaced; and should be held to under 200 words.

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Millennial Fever

WITH ONLY eighteen years to go, it's time to get ready for the new millennium. If you are a devotee of TV preachers, you don't need to be reminded. You're already girding your loins, converting Jews, storing nuts, and doing whatever else is necessary to prepare for the Great Day. But if instead you spend your Sunday mornings with the *New York Times*, you will have been alerted to the Coming not by Jerry Falwell but by Flora Lewis. Twice already this year, she has dropped into her *Times* column an offhand reference to the Great Change. Most recently, while trying to explain the "feeling of dangerous weakness" in the West, she wrote, "I am inclined to think it comes from a deeper bewilderment as societies move into the third millennium and sense change coming without knowing how to direct it." A fixation on the year 2000 does testify to a certain fascination with the decimal system and large numbers, but Lewis neglects to explain why the approach of the millennium should affect anything at all. We all get a thrill when our odometers are swept clean of nines and are reborn in a blaze of zeroes, but few of us plan trips around the event. Nevertheless, even if Lewis had explained her foreboding, I doubt anyone would have listened. Today's numerology is different. We think not in millennia but in decades, a frame of time more suited to modern attention spans. We are confident that we know exactly what the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s signified. True, the 1980s were a problem (at first they were thought to be the Decade of Real Estate) until Ronald Reagan's election settled the issue. He gave the 1980s their identity: a reenactment of the 1930s, echoing the dramatic themes of New Deal, depression, and rearmament. The idea of a half-century cycle is very popular now. We are not quite ready for the wider perspective of a thousand-year vista. True millenarianism will have to await the 1990s, an empty decade that will be spent, like an endless New Year's Eve at Times Square, waiting for the ball to drop.

NEVERTHELESS, the millenarian impulse is always there, waiting to be tapped. Norman Cohn demonstrated that quite convincingly in *Pursuit of the Millennium*, a remarkable account of wave upon wave of apocalyptic frenzy that washed over Europe in the Middle Ages. It still goes on. Only a few years ago it seemed that the revolution was at hand. When that didn't pan out, there was eco-catastrophe and planetary triage. You remember: the greenhouse effect (or, alternatively, the new ice age), ozone depletion, the energy shortage. Now OPEC is drowning in a sea of oil, we fill our gas tanks without waiting in line, and there is not much talk about scarcity anymore. But sure enough, a new eschatology has risen to take its place: THE COMING NUCLEAR WAR, as the *Esquire* headline neatly puts it. Doctors, psychiatrists, and Vermonters declare that we live under the threat of imminent catastrophe. It is hard to pin down exactly why the realization has suddenly sprung up that nuclear weapons can go off at any minute and kill us all. I thought that had been clear since 1962, when Kennedy decided to go eyeball-to-eyeball with Khrushchev over Cuban missiles. True, both sides have accumulated fearsome weapons since then. But in 1962 the Russians and Americans could have blown each other to bits quite nicely. Undoubtedly the current enthusiasm has something to do with the election of Ronald Reagan and the thought of an unschooled cowboy riding the Doomsday Plane. But maybe Flora Lewis is on to something, and people, without looking at their calendars, are feeling the first faint tremors of the Great Day.

IF A CHANGE of hearts is one sign of the coming of that day, then the end is near. The last month has produced not one, but two, startling renunciations of faith. Susan Sontag returned from Paris to declare that Communism is bad, and David Rockefeller, on an African pilgrimage, declared that Communism is O.K. To be sure, Rockefeller was not exactly struck down on the road to Damascus. Long ago, Lenin understood that capitalist industrialists were his allies and would supply the rope for their own hanging. (Although even Lenin thought they'd insist on a sale; he couldn't have imagined they'd give him the rope on credit.) Rockefeller, in effect, was officially ratifying Lenin's wisdom. Sontag's confession was more theatrical. She made it in a speech to a New York rally in support of Solidarity. The audience comprised "various elements of the American left," as the *Nation* described it, "spanning Gore Vidal to PATCO." Sontag also disguised her intentions. First she warmed her audience with a ritual denunciation of American policy in El Salvador. Then she shocked them into boos and hisses by saying that Communism (by which she meant Leninism) is tyranny. For those living outside the Vidal-PATCO axis, the whole episode seemed bizarre. It was as if a zoologist had declared pigs to be wingless and found that he had caused a deep split in zoological circles. In Sontag's circles, said Diana Trilling, seeing and admitting the obvious is considered an act of moral courage. Or worse. To judge by the sharp rebukes later published in the *Nation*, it was an act of betrayal.

THOUGH I find the anachronism of a 1982 debate on the merits of Communism mildly diverting, I find the timing of Sontag's conversion troubling. After all, why should Poland have changed her mind? Jaruzelski simply reimposed Party rule on a society that had lived under it for thirty years, and he did it with only a handful of deaths and a few thousand arrests. Why hadn't Sontag's mind been changed by the thousands drowning in the South China Sea? By the millions who perished in Pol Pot's experiment to remake human nature, in Mao's cultural revolution, in the Gulag? I have a theory. Revolutionary brutalities can be rationalized as necessary evils on the road to Communism (breaking eggs to make the omelet) or as errors (choosing an "incorrect" line). These may be a moral taint on Communism, but Jarulzelski's counterrevolution, though far less brutal, constituted a *theoretical* refutation of it. Solidarity was the first authentic revolutionary mass workers' movement in the Communist world—perhaps in any world—and the Leninist state had to crush it. On the radical left, that is known as a contradiction, and, unlike mass murder, it is a burden too heavy for some faiths to bear.

C. K.

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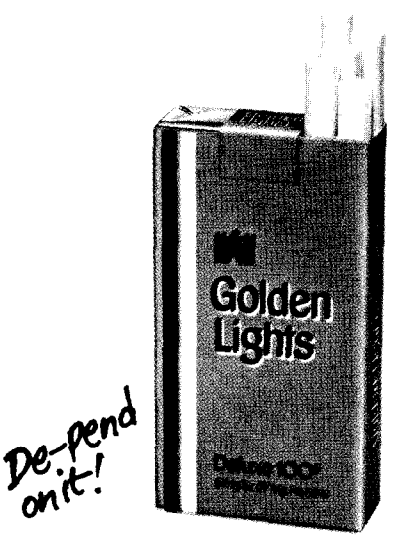

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